

The Public Advocate Office must be set up so as to be independent from utility, special interest, and political influence. It should also benefit from whistleblower protections. The Public Advocate Office should help the public by producing plain-language materials as needed to explain the Section 248 process, ratepayers' rights, and landowners' rights. The Public Advocate Office should discover what the public wants, and advocate for that. If different groups of Vermonters have differing interests in a particular case, advocates should be assigned to represent the interests of each group.

To level the playing field, funds must be available so individuals and organizations who wish to intervene in the Section 248 process have the means to do so.

The Public Advocate Office should be required to share complaints and communications received from the public with the Public Service Board and other parties during the course of Public Service Board proceedings.

Until an effective and independent Public Advocate Office can be established, the Vermont public deserves to have Independent Counsel appointed for all large pending utility cases, including the Addison Natural Gas Project. With so much public dissent about the pipeline, Independent Counsel is needed for Vermonters to feel that they have a real say in what happens in Vermont.

Thank you.

Barbara Clearbridge
Middlebury