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## Out-of-State Energy Providers Knocking on Doors and Preying on Tri-County Residents

### Misinformation and Hidden Costs Push the Limits of Consumer Protection Laws While Misconstruing Benefits of Tri-County's Own, Local Electricity Provider

**Watsonville, CA March 20, 2019** - In collaboration with Monterey Bay Community Power, the Watsonville Law Center, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing free legal and consumer protection services, has identified a rise in out-of-state gas providers knocking on doors and selling services which can mislead customers and result in higher energy costs.

According to Adriana Melgoza, Clinic Manager at the Watsonville Law Center, these third-party providers are using intimidation and misinformation to convince residents to sign up for their alternative service which in occasions can costs more in the long run and involves contracts which are difficult to terminate. Some providers even falsely impersonate PG&E or tri-county's local electricity provider, Monterey Bay Community Power (MBCP). In many instances, these out-of-state providers are convincing residents to opt out of service with tri-county's own, not-for-profit provider, MBCP, and diminishing the potential economic benefit for the greater tri-county community.

"It's a pattern we have seen before and which consistently targets the most vulnerable members of our community; the elderly, those who don't identify with English as their primary language, and other underserved communities." explains Melgoza.

In these extreme cases, Watsonville Law Center has been able to prove that the provider was breaking the law and further legal action resulted in the bill charges being invalidated and the affected customer being compensated for hardship.

"We've seen a rise in customers opting out, especially in Salinas and Hollister," shares MBCP Director of Communications and External Affairs, J.R. Killigrew. "After investigating the matter further, we found these third-party providers and the misinformation they provide are often at the source of people's misunderstanding or mistrust about who MBCP is and what we provide. The reality is, as a not-for-profit public agency, MBCP is the most honest electricity provider that tri-county residents can choose from. And we never knock on doors or ask customers to sign contracts."

Companies based as far away as Canada have targeted vulnerable neighborhoods in Monterey and San Benito counties, squeezing hard-earned dollars from the pockets of our own community members only to deliver them to investors and shareholders who live thousands of miles away and do not contribute anything to the local community. Although some of these businesses can be identified by name, many engage in a shadowy dance of changing names and addresses which makes it difficult to track them down and hold them accountable.

“Even when somebody alerts us about one of these scams the businesses can be difficult to track down and it takes more than one complaint to get them out of our neighborhoods, and much more to get them out of business,” laments Ms. Melgoza. “But once we can prove they are abusing our constituents and even breaking the law, we alert the California Public Utilities Commission and they have the authority to take further action and assist our legal efforts.”

Both MBCP and the Watsonville Law Center encourage businesses and residents to reach out whenever they see or hear of any activity that could be associated with this unjust and sometimes unlawful practice. Contact the Watsonville Law Offices at (831) 722-2845 or MBCP at (888) 909-6227.

#### About Watsonville Law Center

*The Watsonville Law Center (WLC) provides free legal services to low-income individuals on California’s Central Coast. We believe that everyone benefits when the most vulnerable among us thrive, and that a holistic collaborative approach is most effective. We focus on legal problems with long-term impacts and solutions, such as workers’ rights, consumer rights, and access to employment.*

[www.watsonvillelawcenter.org](http://www.watsonvillelawcenter.org)

#### About Monterey Bay Community Power

*Monterey Bay Community Power is a Community Choice Energy agency established by local communities to source carbon-free electricity for Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz counties while retaining PG&E’s traditional role delivering power and maintaining electric infrastructure. As a locally controlled not-for-profit, MBCP is not taxpayer funded and supports Tri-County economic vitality by providing cleaner energy at a lower cost, supporting low-income rate payers, and funding local renewable energy projects. For more information, visit:*

[www.mbcommunitypower.org](http://www.mbcommunitypower.org)