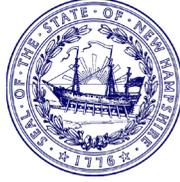


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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
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October 3, 2022

Daniel C. Goldner, Chairman
New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission
21 South Fruit Street
Concord, NH 03301

Re: DE 22-043 Low Income Electric Assistance Program, 2022-2023 Electric Assistance Program Budgets, *Joint filing of Consultant Report & Electric Assistance Program Advisory Board Recommendations*

Dear Chairman Goldner:

The New Hampshire Department of Energy (DOE) is making this joint filing on behalf of itself, Public Service Company of New Hampshire d/b/a Eversource Energy (Eversource), Liberty Utilities (Granite State Electric) Corp. d/b/a Liberty (Liberty), the New Hampshire Electric Cooperative, Inc. (NHEC), Unitil Energy Systems, Inc. (UES), the Community Action Agencies, (CAA), and LISTEN Community Services (LISTEN), represented by New Hampshire Legal Assistance (NHLA).

As directed by the Commission, enclosed please find the *New Hampshire Electric Assistance Program Review of Performance/Future Directions* (September 2022) the report of Roger Colton of Fisher, Sheehan & Colton, the consultant with whom Eversource contracted, on behalf of the Department of Energy, to undertake a review and evaluation of the Electric Assistance Program (EAP). (“Colton Report”). *See* Dkt. No. DG 21-133, Procedural Order (August 11, 2022). Also enclosed are the *EAP Advisory Board Recommendations* (September 28, 2022) relative to the Colton Report. *See id.* This letter further summarizes recommendations that the parties, as identified above, ask the Commission to approve and adopt and, in the alternative, requests a hearing. Finally, this letter refers the Commission to recent legislation that makes an additional \$7 million available to the EAP program.

The DOE, and the parties on behalf of whom the DOE makes this filing, support the Colton Report and *EAP Advisory Board Recommendations* in full. Accordingly, the identified parties ask the Commission to approve and adopt the Colton Report’s Recommendations #1 (maintain the 750-kWh limit for the application of the EAP discount), #3 (modify tier discounts to provide greater assistance to lower income tiers)¹,

¹ *See* Colton Report at 49 (modifying the tiers at “Realignment Option #3B,” in advance of Unitil’s most recent default electric service rate increase, was anticipated to increase EAP costs by no more than approximately \$85,627). In addition, the utilities anticipate that, once directed to do so, fully implementing

#4 (retain the five existing discount tiers), and #5 (recommend that a generic investigation be done with regard to an arrearage management program). Recommendation #2, identifying participants with high usage and referring them to the low-income weatherization assistance program, occurs today and should continue into the future. With regard to Recommendations #6 and 7, the parties agree that data sharing between the CAA and the NH Department of Health and Human Services is an opportunity for targeting assistance to the most vulnerable households and requests that the Commission support endeavors by the CAA to pursue data sharing agreements and approve any prudently incurred associated start-up and ongoing costs of such agreements.

In a recent order, Order No. 26,693 (September 29, 2022), the Commission stated on page 4, “. . . ad-hoc action is not a substitute for prudent management of the EAP program going forward. The Commission will consider matters of EAP budgeting, administration, and program design in the near future, in an effort to be proactive in ensuring that ratepayers receive the maximum benefit from the program.” The parties to this filing would like to note that the depletion of EAP funds is not due to a lack of prudent management, but rather an unprecedentedly sharp spike in the price of electric supply. In the opinion of the filing parties, the EAP Advisory Board has acted responsibly in its oversight of the EAP and in its monitoring of the sustainability of the EAP program, reviewing SBC revenues collected, benefits paid, and enrollment on a monthly basis and more frequently when appropriate, and will continue to do so during the upcoming months, with heightened attention to projected energy prices for 2023. Should the EAP Advisory Board find that programmatic changes, which may include the implementation of a wait list, are necessary, the filing parties are confident that, consistent with past practice, the EAP Advisory Board will file its recommendations into the docket for Commission review.

In the event that the Commission does not approve and adopt the *EAP Advisory Board's Recommendations*, as summarized in this letter, the identified parties request a hearing, and request that an order of notice precede any scheduled hearing to provide maximum opportunity for all parties to address any Commission questions and concerns.

The DOE and other named parties would also like to reference recent legislation relevant to the EAP. On September 15, 2022, after Mr. Colton filed his report, new legislation made an additional \$7 million dollars available to the EAP program to support

tier modification for billing systems based on a services-rendered basis, including related changes, would take some utilities as long as eight weeks. Unlike the other utilities, the NHEC implements rate changes, which would include changes to the benefit tiers, on a bills-rendered basis rather than a service-rendered basis. Some utilities also require that rate changes be made on the first day of the month. CAA estimates software changes, including scheduling IT contractors, will also require some time.

the continued payment of benefits. *See* Chapter 346:4, HB 2023-FN-Final Version (\$7 million appropriated to EAP). It is the DOE's understanding that the appropriation shall supplement the dedicated fund established for the EAP. *See id.*

Sincerely,

s/ Mary E. Schwarzer

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