

## **Energy Planning Advisory Board**

### **Stakeholder Form**

**June 23, 2006**

### **Comments of New Hampshire Legal Assistance**

#### **A. New Hampshire Legal Assistance**

New Hampshire Legal Assistance (NHLA) is a non-profit legal services program. NHLA receives funding from multiple sources, such as the United Way, to provide legal services to low-income and elderly households in certain kinds of civil matters. For example, NHLA represents clients in consumer matters, landlord-tenant cases, and matters involving governmental benefit programs such as welfare, food stamps, Social Security disability and unemployment compensation.

NHLA also represents individuals and groups before the Public Utilities Commission and legislature in matters involving electric and gas utilities and telecommunications providers. For example, NHLA has been involved in electric restructuring since 1996. NHLA is a member of the PUC Electric Assistance Program Advisory Board and was a member of the PUC Electric Energy Efficiency Working Group. This Working Group produced a report and recommendations to the Public Utilities Commission in July 1999 regarding statewide electric energy efficiency policies.

NHLA has provided representation to low-income individuals and groups with respect to the development and implementation of the statewide low-income Electric Assistance Program as well as the pilot bill discount program for low-income natural gas customers. NHLA also participated in the development and implementation of statewide energy efficiency programs for low-income electric and natural gas customers.

#### **B. Comments Regarding Statewide Energy Planning Policies**

##### **1. Hard Choices For Low-Income Customers**

As noted by the Energy Planning Advisory Board in its Press Release of May 22, 2006, there have been dramatic increases in energy costs. The Board also noted that there is a need to develop a state energy policy premised on the fundamental goals of "security, affordability and sustainability". For low-income and elderly electric and natural gas customers these are critical issues, particularly the goal of affordability. Many low-income customers and fixed income elderly customers struggle on a daily basis with issues of affordability. Our clients often have to scrimp on food and medications so that they can pay their utility bills in order to avoid termination of service.

2. Recommendations

1) Electric Assistance Program.

The Electric Assistance Program (EAP) has helped make electric service more affordable to thousands of low-income customers since the program began in 2002. However, legislative authorization for the System Benefits Charge, which funds the program, sunsets on June 30, 2008. We recommend that the sunset provision in RSA 374-F:4, VIII (c) be repealed and the program made permanent. In addition, we recommend that the legislative cap of 1.5 mills for the EAP System Benefits Charge, contained in RSA 374-F:4, VIII (c), be increased because current funding levels are insufficient to serve all of the eligible low-income customers who have applied for the program.

2) Electric Energy Efficiency Programs.

The statewide Electric Energy Efficiency Programs, which began in 2002, have resulted in significant energy savings. The programs have also helped reduce bills and made electricity more affordable and manageable for low-income customers, in accordance with the legislative policy as set forth in RSA 374-F:3, V (a). There is significant demand for these programs today, particularly in the residential and low-income customer sectors. Accordingly, we recommend that the legislative cap of 1.8 mills for the System Benefits Charge for the statewide electric energy efficiency programs, set forth in Chapter 29:14, 2001 (HB 429), be increased.

3. Conclusion

State energy policies and planning should include the expansion of electric and natural gas energy efficiency programs, and should assure that electric and natural gas service is affordable to low income and elderly customers.

Submitted by  
Alan Linder  
New Hampshire Legal Assistance  
PO Box 778  
Portsmouth, NH 03802-0778  
Phone: (603) 431-7411

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