

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

March 13, 2020 - 10:02 a.m.
Concord, New Hampshire

NHPUC 30MAR'20PM3:55

RE: ⁰¹³ **DG 20-103**

**RESIDENTIAL LOW INCOME ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM FOR NATURAL GAS CUSTOMERS:
Consideration of Program Design Change.
(Prehearing conference)**

PRESENT: Cmsr. Kathryn M. Bailey, Presiding
Cmsr. Michael S. Giaimo

Jody Carmody, Clerk

APPEARANCES: **Reptg. Northern Utilities, Inc.:**
Patrick H. Taylor, Esq.

**Reptg. Liberty Utilities (EnergyNorth
Natural Gas) Corp.:**
Michael J. Sheehan, Esq.

Reptg. The Way Home:
Stephen Tower, Esq.
N.H. Legal Assistance

Reptg. Residential Ratepayers:
D. Maurice Kreis, Esq., Consumer Adv.
Office of Consumer Advocate

Reptg. PUC Staff:
Mary Schwarzer, Esq.
Amanda Noonan, Dir./Consumer Services
& External Affairs (CSEA)
Rorie Patterson, Asst. Dir./CSEA Div.
Al-Azad Iqbal, Gas & Water Division

Court Reporter: Steven E. Patnaude, LCR No. 52

**CERTIFIED
ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT**

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P R O C E E D I N G

CMSR. BAILEY: Good morning. We're here today in Docket Number DG 20-013, to consider program changes to the Residential Low Income Assistance Program for national -- sorry -- for natural gas customers. We received affidavits of publication from both utilities. I note that Northern asked for a waiver of the filing of the affidavit for publication for one day to get the paper copy in, and we will accept that filing. We have motions to intervene from Community Action Program and The Way Home.

Before we get started, let's take appearances.

MR. TAYLOR: Good morning, Commissioners. Patrick Taylor, on behalf of Northern Utilities, Inc. With me today is Christopher Goulding.

And, just so the Commissioners are aware, we also have three folks participating by phone today: Sue Corson, Laura Dionne, and Gary Mathews.

CMSR. BAILEY: Thank you.

MR. SHEEHAN: Good morning. Mike

1 Sheehan, for Liberty Utilities (EnergyNorth
2 Natural Gas). And with me are David Simek,
3 Heather Tebbetts, and Missy Samenfeld.

4 MS. SCHWARZER: Good morning,
5 Commission --

6 MR. TOWER: Good morning. This is
7 Steve Tower, representing The Way Home. I'm with
8 New Hampshire Legal Assistance.

9 MR. KREIS: Good morning,
10 Commissioners. I am D. Maurice Kreis, the
11 Consumer Advocate, here on behalf of residential
12 utility customers.

13 MS. SCHWARZER: Good morning. I'm Mary
14 Schwarzer, Staff attorney here at the PUC. With
15 me are Stephen Frink, Director of Gas and Water;
16 Amanda Noonan and Rorie Patterson, Director and
17 Assistant Director of the Consumer Services and
18 External Affairs Division; and Iqbal, the
19 Assistance Director for Water and Gas -- excuse
20 me, not the Assistant Director of Water and Gas,
21 an analyst.

22 CMSR. BAILEY: Good morning. All
23 right. Are there motions -- are any objections
24 to the motions to intervene by The Way Home and

1 Community Action?

2 MR. TAYLOR: No objection.

3 MR. SHEEHAN: No objection.

4 MS. SCHWARZER: No.

5 CMSR. BAILEY: Thank you. Then, we'll
6 grant those motions.

7 So, let's start with initial positions.
8 Mr. Taylor.

9 MR. TAYLOR: The Company has been made
10 a mandatory party to this proceeding. We're very
11 happy to be a participant, and look forward to
12 working with the Staff, the Consumer Advocate,
13 The Way Home, and any other parties in resolving
14 this docket.

15 Thank you.

16 CMSR. BAILEY: Mr. Sheehan.

17 MR. SHEEHAN: Thank you. Reading the
18 Staff recommendation in the Order of Notice, we
19 agree that, after fifteen years of this program,
20 it deserves a new look. We have no particular
21 issues or problems with the way it's run. But
22 we, through this process, may, with the others,
23 find a better way to do it. We're happy to go
24 through that process.

1 Thank you.

2 CMSR. BAILEY: Mr. Tower.

3 MR. TOWER: The Way Home is aware that,
4 if this program is to have changes made to it, it
5 will affect the low income population that they
6 serve, the low-income ratepayers that they serve.
7 And we want to be involved in that discussion, to
8 make sure that, if there are changes made, those
9 changes are done in a way that is not harmful to
10 the people The Way Home serves.

11 We're also possibly interested in making
12 sure that this program is as accessible and
13 available to those who are eligible for it as
14 possible.

15 Thank you.

16 CMSR. BAILEY: Mr. Kreis.

17 MR. KREIS: Thank you. The Office of
18 the Consumer Advocate is certainly supportive of
19 efforts to examine the efficacy and propriety of
20 this or any other low income assistance program,
21 and we will participate actively.

22 I do have to confess that I'm a little
23 troubled by this docket. As I understand the
24 Staff's memorandum, the concern is basically that

1 this program is helping poor people more than it
2 was originally expected to help them. And I'm
3 sitting in a room full of middle and upper middle
4 class people talking about that subject, and there
5 are no poor people here.

6 That troubles me. And I want to make
7 sure that nothing we do here is done simply for
8 the purpose of making life more difficult for low
9 income people.

10 CMSR. BAILEY: I'm sure that was not
11 the Staff's intent.

12 Ms. Schwarzer.

13 MS. SCHWARZER: Thank you. Staff are
14 happy to work with stakeholders to reevaluate the
15 existing program needs and goals, and to assess
16 how to provide discounts in an efficient and
17 cost-effective manner, taking into account the
18 bill impacts on all customers.

19 I will note that the initial percentages
20 in the order from 2006 are simply not being met in
21 the same way. And it is not Staff's intent to in
22 any way punish or harm low income people. I'm not
23 sure exactly what OCA was addressing. But it's
24 just our intent to open the docket, look at the

1 program structure, and evaluate whether either the
2 delivery or the goals need to be addressed.

3 CMSR. BAILEY: Okay. Thank you. I
4 think, with that, we will leave you to your
5 technical session and adjourn the hearing for
6 today. Thank you.

7 *(Whereupon the prehearing*
8 *conference was adjourned at 10:08*
9 *a.m., and a technical session was*
10 *held thereafter.)*