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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**PUC EXPANDS  
ELECTRIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

The Public Utilities Commission adopted today a recommendation by the Electric Assistance Program Advisory Board, made up of representatives from electric utilities, state agencies and social service organizations, to raise the low income system benefits charge in order to provide bill discounts to an additional 6,000 low-income customers for the coming winter. PUC Consumer Affairs Director Amanda Noonan said, "The expansion of the Electric Assistance Program to serve 34,000 customers is especially timely in light of increasing energy costs and an uncertain national economy. The Advisory Board felt that the overall bill impact on customers from expanding the program was slight in comparison to the average \$430 annual benefit that could be made available to a greater number of needy families and individuals."

As part of restructuring the electric industry in New Hampshire in 1996, the Legislature established the system benefits charge as a means for funding, among other things, programs that "enable residential customers with low incomes to manage and afford essential electrical

requirements.” The PUC approved the Electric Assistance Program in May 2002 and set a charge of 1.2 mills per kilowatt hour that would be collected from all electric customers. The EAP was initially expected to collect \$13.2 million annually and serve 25,000 customers.

Since 2002, the PUC has made numerous changes to the Electric Assistance Program in order to better target assistance to the most needy, expand coverage to more customers, limit administrative costs, and obtain greater operating efficiencies. At the same time, energy prices have climbed steadily in the past several years, and recently the economy has become more turbulent. PUC Executive Director Debra Howland stated, “The Commission has pursued every avenue to meet the objectives of the Electric Assistance Program without raising the system benefits charge. It concluded today that because of rising energy costs and increasing need it was time to raise the low income charge to the limit allowed by the Legislature in order to serve more individuals and families in New Hampshire.”

The increase in the system benefits charge to 1.5 mills per kWh will generate an additional \$3.3 million annually to serve low income customers throughout the state. A residential customer using 500 kWh monthly will see a bill increase of 15 cents, or an annual increase of \$1.80. The average small business customer will see a \$7.50 annual increase, while the average large commercial or industrial customer will see a \$3,400 increase.

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