



Low-Income Energy Network

January 6, 2011

Ms Cynthia Chaplin
Interim Chair
Ontario Energy Board
2300 Yonge St., 27th floor
Toronto, Ontario M4P 1E4

and

Honourable Brad Duguid
Minister of Energy
900 Bay St., 4th floor
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2E1

Dear Ms Chaplin and Minister Duguid,

Over the last several months LIEN has participated in the Ontario Energy Board's **Low-income Energy Assistance Program** (LEAP) Financial Assistance Working Group. Recently, it has come to our attention that Ontario Energy Board staff will be suggesting to the Board that only LEAP agencies should be permitted to assess income for the purpose of accessing the customer service measures specific to low-income consumers. We believe that making these customer service measures available only through LEAP agents will have a detrimental effect on low-income consumers and the existing network of agencies that assist them.

LIEN has expressed some concerns to Board staff regarding this restriction which limits the assessment of income solely to LEAP agencies. We believe that all agencies that have experience or are currently administering emergency energy assistance should be permitted to access the targeted customer service measures, as well as continuing to advocate and negotiate on behalf of low-income consumers.

Resources to low-income consumers need to be expanded, adding to the current landscape of emergency energy assistance so that they are able to easily access the help that they need. Excluding agencies that currently provide emergency energy assistance to low-income consumers, especially in rural areas, will reduce accessibility for the low-income consumer. It will also put at risk the vital relationships that currently exist in communities between the agencies that are delivering energy programs and low-income consumers.

Many of the agencies currently delivering emergency assistance already have excellent working relationships with their LDC, as well as knowledge of LDC operations. They have experience using customer service measures while they attempt to negotiate a positive resolution to a client's outstanding account with the utility. Low-income consumers who seek help from such agencies for emergency assistance may be unable to visit another agency (whether for medical

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reasons, availability of transportation, lack of available time, or otherwise) to access customer service measures. In such cases, a low-income consumer may face disconnection. Additionally, we are concerned that by limiting access, a number of social service agencies that currently provide emergency energy assistance would be disabled.

We hope that the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure and the Ontario Energy Board can work together to ensure that the current landscape of emergency energy assistance that has benefited low-income consumers does not get uprooted as LEAP is implemented across the province.

LEAP must improve assistance provided to low-income energy consumers, not erode it. Both the Ministry and the Ontario Energy Board must ensure that access to energy assistance is not complicated and limited through program design.

Yours sincerely,

Per: **Low-Income Energy Network**



Zee Bhanji
LIEN Coordinator

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