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VIA E-MAIL AND WEB POSTING

July 17, 2020

**To: All Electricity Distributors
All Natural Gas Distributors
All Licensed Unit Sub-Meter Providers**

Re: Enhanced Funding for LEAP Emergency Financial Assistance for 2020

This letter serves to inform electricity and gas distributors of the Ontario Energy Board's (OEB) decision related to 2020 funding for the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program – Emergency Financial Assistance (LEAP EFA).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the OEB has undertaken several measures to help energy consumers who may be facing difficulty in paying their energy bills. On March 19, 2020, the OEB extended the winter disconnection ban for electricity distributors to July 31, 2020 and broadened it to include small business customers. Although the ban did not apply to gas distributors and unit sub-meter providers (USMPs), many of these entities also announced a temporary moratorium on disconnections for this same time period. The OEB has also implemented the COVID-19 Energy Assistance Program (CEAP) for residential consumers and is currently working on implementation of CEAP for small business.

With the extended disconnection ban ending July 31st, the OEB recognizes that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, potential need for LEAP EFA may be greater this year and more consumers may meet the eligibility criteria. To support this potential increased need, the OEB is approving an increase in the amount a distributor may recover for the purpose of contributing to LEAP EFA funding for 2020.

Distributors may make a one-time increase to LEAP EFA funding by a maximum of 50% of their 2020 fiscal year funding amount. The additional funding is to be made available to agencies for use in the LEAP EFA for 2020. Given the importance of supporting consumers during this extraordinary time, the OEB is permitting the increased funding to be recorded in the Account Impacts Arising from the COVID-19 Emergency, Sub-account Other Costs. These amounts are to be tracked separately from other amounts

in the sub-account so that they can be clearly identified for review in future disposition requests.

The OEB has determined that allowing for additional funding may address potential greater need for assistance as a result of the pandemic, including the possibility of increased numbers of low-income consumers who may not have needed to use the program before but have been impacted by COVID-19 and have had difficulty paying their energy bills.

The OEB surveyed consumers as part of its review of the LEAP EFA program in 2019 and determined that 60% of consumers support a program that results in a bill impact of up to \$0.25 per month. The distributors' increased funding amounts will be well below this bill impact.

Distributors that choose to increase funding that will be tracked in the Impacts Arising from the COVID-19 Emergency Account are required to advise the OEB that they are doing so, including the additional funding amount.

Distributors are also reminded that they may continue, at their choice, to provide additional (non-recoverable) donations to supplement their LEAP EFA funds.

Disconnection Holds for LEAP EFA Eligibility Assessment

The customer service rules established in the Distribution System Code, Gas Distribution Access Rule and Unit Sub-Metering Code require distributors and USMPs to place a 21-day hold on their disconnection process when they receive notification from a LEAP EFA intake agency that the agency is assessing a customer for LEAP EFA eligibility. To assist intake agencies with a potential increase in applications and prevent consumers from being disconnected while the agency is reviewing the application, the OEB encourages distributors and USMPs (where system functionality exists) to expand the hold from 21 to 35 days. Distributors and USMPs will continue to have up to 14 days to act on the previous disconnection notice upon notification from the intake agency that the consumer is not eligible for LEAP EFA assistance, provided the relevant notice period set out in the customer service rules has elapsed prior to disconnection and contact with the consumer is attempted at least 48 hours prior to the planned disconnection date.

The OEB expects distributors and USMPs to continue to focus on promoting solutions for customers that have arrears, including greater flexibility in payment terms and in offering arrears payment agreements. Distributors and USMPs should also continue to

increase awareness of assistance or support that may be available through other programs such as the Ontario Electricity Support Program or the COVID-19 Energy Assistance Program where the consumer may be eligible.

LEAP EFA intake agencies have worked diligently to support energy consumers during the extended disconnection ban period and the OEB appreciates the key role the agencies play in the delivery of LEAP EFA and helping energy consumers maintain their energy service.

Any questions relating to this letter should be directed to the OEB's Industry Relations Enquiry email at IndustryRelations@oeb.ca. Please include "Expanded LEAP EFA Funding" in the subject line.

Yours truly,

Original signed by

Christine E. Long
Registrar and Board Secretary