

Ontario Energy Board
Brian Hewson, Vice President Consumer Protection and Industry Performance
Via email 2023LEAPReview@oeb.ca

7 December 2023

Dear Brian,

Thank you for the consultative and evidence based recommendations for enhancements of the Low Income Energy Assistance Program. Overall, the recommended changes recognize the shift in the economy and the intersectionality that rising costs in housing, utilities and food has in creating precarious housing situations for our most vulnerable in the community.

We are extremely pleased to see recommendations that will help close the gap between magnitude of arrears being experienced and the value of the grants in order to provide housing stability for low income households. In these economic times and a two year outlook where according to RBC Capital Market, 60% of households will be faced with further increasing housing costs of up to 48% in payment shock for home owners with mortgages to renew in this time period as well as the continuing rise in the rental market, United Way Simcoe Muskoka believes the doubling of grants in 2022 better met the objectives of the program as evidenced by a reduction in households repeatedly applying for financial assistance in subsequent years and would take into account this economic outlook in the short to mid term. This will ensure the changes made now will endure in meeting the needs of households for the near future given the economic volatility.

The remaining Recommendations put forward are also commendable, we want to express the value of these changes to assist households in a time of need. The implementation of such recommendations, in particular “no applicant should be denied due to funding” and new income thresholds and grant amounts being introduced invariably leads to logistical questions to ensure it is done equitably, fairly and transparently for all consumers. We would be appreciative of understanding the OEBs communication plan on this and would extend our willingness to provide input from the perspective of a Lead Agency. Our experience with the transition to and out of the 2022 grant changes has provided us with learnings we feel would be valuable to consider.

The recommended program changes do not address the provision for households to apply more than once to the maximum grant amount in any calendar year. Clarification on this being adopted as a permanent change to the LEAP program would be helpful.

If you need any further clarification or information, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Thank you for your consideration of our input to the recommendations. We look forward to continuing our long-standing work together to serve the most vulnerable in our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. McCormick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a vertical line through the middle of the name.

Sharon McCormick
Chief Administrative Officer