

**STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION**

DE 14-337

STATEWIDE LOW-INCOME ELECTRIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

**Notice of Opportunity to Comment on the Use of Low-Income SBC Funds to
Provide Assistance outside Existing Utility Program**

ORDER OF NOTICE

The Electric Assistance Program (EAP) provides bill assistance to income eligible customers of Liberty Utilities, New Hampshire Electric Cooperative, Public Service Company of New Hampshire and Unitil Energy Systems. There are five discount tiers ranging from 8% to 77% depending on customers' income in relation to the federal poverty guidelines. The discounts are designed to reduce customers' electric bills, on average, to between 4% and 5% of their income. EAP eligibility, as well as discount level, is determined by gross household income and household size. The EAP is funded by the low-income portion of the system benefits charge ("SBC"). By statute, the portion of the SBC that may be used for low-income assistance is limited to a maximum charge of 1.5 mills per kilowatt hour. RSA 374-F:4, VIII (c).

In September and October of 2014, the Commission approved winter energy service rates for residential electric customers of Liberty Utilities and Unitil that will result in increases to their average monthly bill of more than 47% and 44% respectively. In its orders approving the higher winter energy service rates, the Commission expressed its concern about the impact of the rate increases on customers. *See* Order No. 25,719 (September 29, 2014) and Order No. 25,720 (October 3, 2014). The New Hampshire Electric Cooperative increased the price of its energy service offering by approximately 12%, and PSNH will be filing its request for a new energy service rate in December.

To address the impact of increasing electric energy costs on households that are marginally above the income eligibility level established for the EAP, the Commission is considering the establishment of a one-time, financial benefit for low-income electric customers who would not otherwise receive assistance from the EAP. Accordingly, the Commission invites the filing of written comments on the following issues:

1. Eligibility: By what financial and other criteria should a household be found eligible to receive low-income-dedicated SBC funds outside of the existing utility-administered financial assistance program? Should households receiving financial assistance through the existing utility-administered program be eligible for incremental financial assistance outside of this program or should incremental financial assistance be used solely for low-income households who are not eligible for assistance from the utility program?
2. Funding: How much of the existing balance of low-income-dedicated SBC funds should be used to temporarily provide assistance to low-income households and how will this temporary use impact that existing balance? By what process should this funding be transferred to the eligible low-income households or to a non-utility administrator providing financial assistance to eligible low-income households?
3. Costs: What are the costs associated with administering this one-time, financial benefit outside of the utility assistance programs and how would these costs be recovered?

Comments in the form of specific proposals or on other issues relevant to the Commission's consideration of a one-time financial benefit are encouraged.

The filing raises, *inter alia*, issues related to whether the use of SBC funds outside of the existing utility program is consistent with RSA 374-F:3, VI (authorizing electric utilities' collection of a "nonbypassable and competitively neutral" SBC "used to fund public benefits related to the provision of electricity") and RSA 374-F:4, VIII.


Based upon the foregoing, it is hereby

ORDERED, that written comments consistent with this order be filed with the Commission pursuant to Puc 202.06 no later than December 10, 2014; and it is

FURTHER ORDERED, that a public comment hearing on the use of low-income SBC funds for a one-time financial benefit for low-income electric customers who would not otherwise receive assistance from the EAP be held before the Commission located at 21 S. Fruit St., Suite 10, Concord, New Hampshire on December 22, 2014 at 2:00 p.m.; and it is

FURTHER ORDERED, that pursuant to N.H. Code Admin. Rules Puc 203.12, the Commission shall notify all persons desiring to be heard at this hearing by publishing a copy of this Order of Notice no later than December 1, 2014, in a newspaper with general circulation in those areas of the state in which operations are conducted.

By order of the Public Utilities Commission of New Hampshire this twenty-fourth day of November, 2014.



Debra A. Howland
Executive Director

Individuals needing assistance or auxiliary communication aids due to sensory impairment or other disability should contact the Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator, NHPUC, 21 S. Fruit St., Suite 10, Concord, New Hampshire 03301-2429; 603-271-2431; TDD Access: Relay N.H. 1-800-735-2964. Notification of the need for assistance should be made one week prior to the scheduled event.

SERVICE LIST - EMAIL ADDRESSES - DOCKET RELATED

Pursuant to N.H. Admin Rule Puc 203.11 (a) (1): Serve an electronic copy on each person identified on the service list.

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FILING INSTRUCTIONS:

- a) Pursuant to N.H. Admin Rule Puc 203.02 (a), with the exception of Discovery, file 7 copies, as well as an electronic copy, of all documents including cover letter with: DEBRA A HOWLAND
EXEC DIRECTOR
NHPUC
21 S. FRUIT ST, SUITE 10
CONCORD NH 03301-2429
- b) Serve an electronic copy with each person identified on the Commission's service list and with the Office of Consumer Advocate.
- c) Serve a written copy on each person on the service list not able to receive electronic mail.