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STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

August 4, 2020 - 10:14 a.m.
Concord, New Hampshire

RE: DG 20-013 RESIDENTIAL LOW-INCOME
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR NATURAL GAS
CUSTOMERS CONSIDERATION OF PROGRAM
DESIGN CHANGE
(Hearing)

PRESENT: Chairwoman Dianne Martin, Presiding
Commissioner Kathryn M. Bailey
Commissioner Michael S. Giaimo

Jody Carmody, Clerk

APPEARANCES: Reptg. Liberty Utilities (ENGI)
Michael J. Sheehan, Esq.

Representing Northern Utilities, Inc.:
Patrick H. Taylor, Esq.

Representing The Way Home:
Stephen Tower, Esq. - NHLA

Representing Community Action Program:
Kristen LaPanne, Esq.

Reptg. Residential Ratepayers:
D. Maurice Kreis, Esq.
Office of Consumer Advocate

Reptg. PUC Staff:
Mary Schwarzer, Esq.

Court Reporter: Susan J. Robidas, NH LCR No. 44

I N D E X

WITNESS PANEL: AL-AZAD IQBAL - PUC Staff
PRADIP CHATTOPADHYAY - OCA
HEATHER TEBBETTS - Liberty

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1	Staff Recommendation	Premarked
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3	RLIAP Joint Proposal	Premarked
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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Good morning,
3 everyone. Anything we need to cover before
4 we go on the record?

5 [No verbal response]

6 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: All right.
7 Then we are here this morning in Docket DG
8 20-013, the Residential Low-Income Assistance
9 Program for natural gas customers,
10 consideration of program design change. I
11 need to make some necessary findings because
12 this is a remote hearing.

13 As Chairwoman of the Public
14 Utilities Commission, I find that due to the
15 State of Emergency declared by the Governor
16 as a result of COVID-19 pandemic, and in
17 accordance with the Governor's Emergency
18 Order No. 12, pursuant to Executive Order
19 2020-04, this public body is authorized to
20 meet electronically. Please note that there
21 is no physical location to observe and listen
22 contemporaneously to this hearing which was
23 authorized pursuant to the Governor's
24 Emergency Order. However, in accordance with

1 the Emergency Order, I am confirming that we
2 are utilizing Webex for this electronic
3 hearing. All members of the Commission have
4 the ability to communicate contemporaneously
5 during this hearing through this platform,
6 and the public has access to
7 contemporaneously listen and, if necessary,
8 participate. We previously gave notice to
9 the public of the necessary information for
10 accessing the hearing in the Order of Notice.
11 With me. If anybody has a problem, please
12 call -- Mr. Edelblut, do you have the number
13 for the call-in? I don't have it on my sheet
14 today. Or Mr. Wind? Hang on one second.
15 I'll get it.

16 MR. EDELBLUT: I believe Mr. Wind
17 has that.

18 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Sorry
19 about that. Thank you. 271-2431. In the
20 event the public is unable access the
21 meeting, the meeting will be adjourned and
22 rescheduled.

23 Okay. So let's take appearances.
24 When each Commissioner identifies themselves,

1 please state your name. And if anyone else
2 is with you, please identify them.

3 My name is Dianne Martin. I'm the
4 Chairwoman of the Public Utilities
5 Commission, and no one is with me.

6 Commissioner Bailey.

7 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: Commissioner
8 Kathryn Bailey. And no one is with me in the
9 room.

10 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Commissioner
11 Giaimo.

12 COMMISSIONER GIAIMO: Good morning.
13 Mike Giaimo. No one is with me in the room.

14 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
15 you.

16 And we'll take appearances from
17 counsel, starting with Mr. Taylor, please.

18 MR. TAYLOR: Good morning. This is
19 Patrick Taylor, on behalf of Northern
20 Utilities, Inc. No one is with me in the
21 room.

22 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: All right.
23 Thank you.

24 Mr. Sheehan.

1 MR. SHEEHAN: Good morning. Mike
2 Sheehan for Liberty Utilities (EnergyNorth
3 Natural Gas). Thank you.

4 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: All right.
5 Thank you.

6 Mr. Kreis.

7 MR. KREIS: Good morning,
8 everybody. My name is D. Maurice Kreis, the
9 consumer advocate here on behalf of
10 residential utility customers.

11 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Thank you.

12 MR. SHEEHAN: Madam Chair, I got a
13 message that a person listening in is
14 still -- shows she's in a practice session
15 and she can't hear.

16 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
17 you for letting me know. Let's go off the
18 record for a minute.

19 (Discussion off the record.)

20 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: All right.
21 Let's go back on the record. And I think I
22 was at Mr. Tower.

23 MR. TOWER: Present here, and there
24 is no one else in the room.

1 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Could you
2 introduce yourself and let us know who you're
3 here for.

4 MR. TOWER: Sorry. I'm Attorney
5 Steve Tower with New Hampshire Legal
6 Assistance, and I am here representing The
7 Way Home.

8 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
9 you.

10 And do we have the Community Action
11 Program here? Someone here on behalf of
12 them?

13 MS. LAPANNE: Yes, that's me,
14 Kristin LaPanne.

15 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Great.
16 Can you introduce yourself and say who you
17 represent.

18 MS. LAPANNE: Yes. My name is
19 Kristen LaPanne, and I represent Community
20 Action agencies.

21 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Thank you.
22 And Ms. Schwarzer.

23 MS. SCHWARZER: Good morning,
24 Chairwoman Martin and Commissioners Bailey

1 and Giaimo. I'm representing the Staff
2 today. And with me is Al-Azad Iqbal, utility
3 analyst.

4 I want to note there's been a
5 problem with my audio, so I will be shouting.
6 And if it's difficult for you to hear me,
7 please remind me. I'll try to continue to
8 shout.

9 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Have I
10 missed anybody? Is there anyone else here
11 appearing for anyone?

12 [No verbal response]

13 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Looks like we
14 are good.

15 Ms. Schwarzer, I was able to hear
16 you fairly well just then.

17 I have Exhibits 1 through 4
18 prefiled and premarked. Ms. Schwarzer.

19 MS. SCHWARZER: There are some
20 preliminary matters. I don't want to get
21 ahead of myself. So whenever you're ready
22 for those, just let me know.

23 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: I was just
24 about to recognize you and ask you to give us

1 an overview and let us know how we're going
2 to proceed.

3 MS. SCHWARZER: We are going to
4 proceed this morning with a panel of three
5 witnesses who are addressing the proposed
6 settlement agreement, joint proposed
7 modifications to the RLIAP program. They can
8 be sworn in after some preliminary matters if
9 acceptable to the Commission. At the
10 conclusion of today's hearing, as a condition
11 of the joint proposal, the parties are also
12 going to meet in a separate Webex meeting to
13 discuss outreach.

14 The preliminary matters are
15 twofold: First, Staff filed testimony on
16 July 27th instead of on July 22nd. We did
17 that because Staff testimony addressed the
18 joint proposal which had not yet been filed.
19 All the parties have assented to our
20 extension of time to file, and we ask that
21 the Commission permit that at this time.

22 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. We will
23 grant that request.

24 MS. SCHWARZER: Thank you.

1 Secondly, when filed, The Way Home, through
2 New Hampshire Legal Assistance, had agreed to
3 all but one section of the joint proposal,
4 Section 3D, addressing outreach. Yesterday,
5 New Hampshire Legal Assistance filed notice
6 that The Way Home is 100 percent in agreement
7 with the joint proposal as filed. So I
8 wanted to bring that to the Commission's
9 attention. It may be best if we -- if Staff
10 refiles the joint proposal with the
11 additional two pages that show that New
12 Hampshire Legal Assistance, for The Way Home,
13 fully assents to all terms.

14 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Everyone in
15 agreement with that proposed approach? Okay.
16 Heads nodding -- (connectivity issue)

17 (Court Reporter interrupts.)

18 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. I said
19 seeing no objection, we approve.

20 MS. SCHWARZER: It may be
21 appropriate now for each of the panelists to
22 be sworn in by the stenographer, and then we
23 can proceed.

24 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Ms.

1 Schwarzer, do you -- do the parties expect to
2 have cross-examination?

3 MS. SCHWARZER: I'm sorry?

4 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Do the parties
5 expect to have cross-examination?

6 MS. SCHWARZER: I don't anticipate
7 that there will be many questions from the
8 parties to the individual panelists. I
9 expect that the majority of questions would
10 come from the Commission.

11 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Ms.
12 Robidas, would you swear the witnesses in.

13 (WHEREUPON, AL-AZAD IQBAL, PRADIP
14 CHATTOPADHYAY and HEATHER TEBBETTS
15 were duly sworn and cautioned by the
16 Court Reporter.)

17 AL-AZAD IQBAL , SWORN

18 PRADIP CHATTOPADHYAY, SWORN

19 HEATHER TEBBETTS, SWORN

20 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. And in
21 this case, Ms. Schwarzer, were you intending
22 to go first or --

23 MS. SCHWARZER: Yes, I'm happy to
24 go first.

1 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Go ahead.

2 MS. SCHWARZER: So for clarity, we
3 have an exhibit list was -- excuse me. A
4 witness list was filed with four names;
5 however, Northern's witness is not going to
6 be participating due to technical issues. So
7 the three panelists are Al-Azad Iqbal from
8 Staff, Pradip Chattopadhyay from the OCA, and
9 Heather Tebbetts from Liberty. So I will
10 address my questions to Mr. Iqbal.

11 DIRECT EXAMINATION OF AL-AZAD IQBAL

12 BY MS. SCHWARZER:

13 Q. For the record, would you please state your
14 name and position with the Commission.

15 A. (Iqbal) My name is Al-Azad Iqbal. I'm a
16 utility analyst in Gas and Water Division.

17 Q. And in that role did you analyze and evaluate
18 the RLIAP program, both in its initial form
19 and as negotiated and reflected in the joint
20 proposal settlement agreement, with a focus
21 on the costs and benefits of the program?

22 A. (Iqbal) Yes, I did.

23 Q. And did you submit prefiled direct testimony
24 which has been marked for identification as

1 Exhibit 4?

2 A. (Iqbal) Yes, I did.

3 Q. And was that testimony prepared by you or
4 under your direction and supervision?

5 A. (Iqbal) Yes.

6 Q. Are there any corrections or substantive
7 changes that you would like to make to your
8 testimony at this time?

9 A. (Iqbal) No.

10 Q. And if I were to ask you those same questions
11 again today, would you provide the same
12 answers?

13 A. (Iqbal) Yes.

14 Q. And do you adopt that prefiled testimony as
15 your testimony for the purposes of this
16 hearing?

17 A. (Iqbal) Yes.

18 Q. Would you please summarize the settlement
19 agreement.

20 A. (Iqbal) The settlement agreement is
21 straightforward. The most significant change
22 is that the parties propose to replace the
23 60 percent discount on distribution rates
24 with a 45 percent discount on distribution

1 and supply rates during the winter months,
2 November to April. The change is expected to
3 have a minimal impact on current cost of the
4 program and on the low-income customer
5 service. That change will provide a greater
6 rate relief to qualifying customers when most
7 needed during the winter months when bills
8 are greatest, and will remain consistent year
9 to year regardless of changes to distribution
10 and supply rates. My testimony describes
11 other changes and how the changes improve the
12 program.

13 MS. SCHWARZER: Thank you. I have
14 no further questions.

15 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Mr.
16 Sheehan.

17 MR. SHEEHAN: Thank you.

18 DIRECT EXAMINATION OF HEATHER TEBBETTS

19 BY MR. SHEEHAN:

20 Q. Ms. Tebbetts, could you please introduce
21 yourself and your employer.

22 A. (Tebbetts) Yes. Can you hear me?

23 Q. Yes.

24 A. (Tebbetts) Okay. My name is Heather

1 Tebbetts, and I work for Liberty Utilities
2 Service Company. I'm the manager of Rates
3 and Regulatory Affairs, and I'm responsible
4 for rate-related matters for EnergyNorth
5 Natural Gas.

6 Q. Ms. Tebbetts, did you participate in the
7 various technical sessions and conversations
8 that resulted in the agreement that we have
9 marked as Exhibit 3 today?

10 A. (Tebbetts) Yes.

11 Q. And on behalf of Liberty, is the Company in
12 support of that agreement as it's been filed?

13 A. (Tebbetts) Yes.

14 Q. Have you had an opportunity to review Mr.
15 Iqbal's testimony?

16 A. (Tebbetts) Yes.

17 Q. And without going line by line, are you
18 generally in agreement with what Mr. Iqbal
19 has described as the history of this docket,
20 the problems that we tried to solve, and the
21 workings of this settlement agreement?

22 A. (Tebbetts) Yes.

23 MR. SHEEHAN: Thank you. That's
24 all I have for Ms. Tebbetts.

1 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: All right.

2 Thank you.

3 Mr. Kreis.

4 MR. KREIS: Thank you.

5 DIRECT EXAMINATION OF PRADIP CHATTOPADHYAY

6 BY MR. KREIS:

7 Q. Good morning. Dr. Chattopadhyay, would you
8 briefly introduce yourself by name and
9 position.

10 A. (Chattopadhyay) Yes. My name is Pradip
11 Chattopadhyay. I am the assistant consumer
12 advocate with the New Hampshire OCA.

13 Q. Dr. Chattopadhyay, you participated in the
14 discussions that led to the signing and
15 filing of this settlement agreement that is
16 before the Commission today; yes?

17 A. (Chattopadhyay) Yes, I did.

18 Q. So I'd like to ask you a few questions about
19 the terms of that settlement agreement,
20 hopefully to make it clear to the Commission
21 why we settled the case the way we did.

22 My first question is what you heard the
23 other witnesses testify, that the settlement
24 agreement is designed for the natural gas

1 low-income program to target -- (connectivity
2 issue)

3 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Mr. Kreis,
4 could you pause for a moment.

5 (Discussion off the record.)

6 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Let's go back
7 on the record. Mr. Kreis, let's see how it
8 goes.

9 MR. KREIS: Sorry about that
10 interruption.

11 BY MR. KREIS:

12 Q. Dr. Chattopadhyay, you heard testimony
13 already that the settlement agreement
14 redesigns the low-income natural gas
15 assistance program to target the available
16 assistance into the winter months of the
17 year. Why did we do that?

18 A. (Chattopadhyay) RLIAP is meant to provide
19 financial assistance for low-income heating
20 customers. Heating is required essentially
21 only during the winter months, so it makes
22 sense to target the RLIAP assistance to only
23 winter -- to be precise, November through
24 April. One has to be mindful that even

1 implementing a subsidy scheme, economic
2 efficiency matters. To the extent providing
3 subsidy for non-existent heating load in
4 summer promotes suboptimal allocation of
5 limited funds to help heating customers, we
6 are essentially depriving financial
7 assistance for some low-income heating
8 customers who deserve such assistance in
9 winter. Given that the New Hampshire FAP
10 credits are available at large for New
11 Hampshire customers, the change supported by
12 the settlement will help solve the
13 suboptimality that is inherent in the current
14 implementation of the RLIAP program.

15 Q. That was "suboptimality"? Is that the phrase
16 you use used?

17 A. (Chattopadhyay) Yes, I did.

18 Q. Thank you.

19 The proposal that's before the
20 Commission today in this settlement agreement
21 sets the discount rate for low-income
22 customers at 45 percent. Why is that the
23 rate number?

24 A. (Chattopadhyay) Mr. Al-Azad Iqbal's written

1 testimony has laid out clearly some of the
2 reasons why we chose the 45 percent discount
3 rate. But I will add that when we were
4 continuing the analytical discussions
5 following the June 17th technical session --
6 that is, between the analysts, I and Iqbal --
7 we analyzed different combinations of FAP
8 credits and gas bill payments to understand
9 how the 45 percent winter-only discount
10 compared to the 35 percent year-round
11 approach. In view of the interaction of FAP
12 with RLIAP, specific circumstances facing
13 specific low-income customers would dictate
14 whether the 35 percent approach proposed by
15 Staff and in its memo is better or worse than
16 the 45 percent discount as proposed in the
17 settlement. Generally speaking, the higher
18 the winter bills are, the greater is the
19 likelihood of the benefit for low-income
20 customers being greater under the 45 percent
21 winter-only discount RLIAP approach than
22 under the 35 percent year-round discount
23 RLIAP approach.

24 Q. And just so the record is clear, RLIAP stands

1 for Residential Low-Income Assistance
2 Program; yes?

3 A. (Chattopadhyay) Correct. And if I may add,
4 in the proposal we are going for another term
5 for it; it's the Gas Assistance Program. If
6 the Commission approves it, that's what we
7 would like it to be called.

8 Q. And when you refer to "FAP," you are talking
9 about what exactly?

10 A. (Chattopadhyay) Fuel Assistance Program.

11 Q. All right. I often hear people say that they
12 don't have a crystal ball. But I actually do
13 have a crystal ball. It's sitting on the
14 conference table in my office. And I looked
15 at it this morning, and it said that both the
16 utility rates and the market for natural gas
17 regionally and nationally are both likely to
18 change in the future in some way or another.

19 How, in your opinion, will this new
20 program design hold up in terms of serving
21 low-income customers when those changes in
22 rates in the natural gas market occur in the
23 future?

24 A. (Chattopadhyay) Given the focus on heating

1 expenses and the fact being that unused FAP
2 credits by some New Hampshire customers will
3 stay with low-income New Hampshire customers
4 at large, regardless, the winter-only
5 approach makes paramount sense as a policy
6 matter, as it is also intended to be
7 appropriately forward-looking. Assuming the
8 FAP credits and the tiers remain unchanged
9 going forward, the higher the distribution
10 rates in the future and potentially higher
11 natural gas prices during several winters
12 will make the 45 percent winter-only discount
13 approach more attractive to low-income
14 ratepayers than the initially proposed
15 35 percent year-round discount approach.

16 The 45 percent approach also has the
17 advantage that the expenses faced by the
18 low-income customers in winter relative to
19 summer exhibits less volatility going
20 forward.

21 Q. Dr. Chattopadhyay, do we have more work to do
22 in terms of looking at the efficacy of the
23 new RLIAP program?

24 A. (Chattopadhyay) I am quite cognizant that we

1 could have perhaps analyzed the efficacy of
2 the RLIAP program in even greater detail in
3 this docket. But all the parties in this
4 docket realized that we needed to propose
5 changes that will relatively promptly help
6 low-income customers deal with the ongoing
7 COVID-19 situation. Naturally, with the
8 trend that residential load is higher with
9 the pandemic, we believe that the winter-only
10 RLIAP proposal will bring immediate relief to
11 low-income customers.

12 The parties have, however, rightly
13 agreed to revisit the experience in '20-'21
14 winter and make further changes or
15 adjustments in the future if necessary. We
16 find pursuing this approach to be very
17 reasonable.

18 Q. Thank you. As a final question, I think I'd
19 like to ask you to elaborate on something you
20 said a minute or two ago.

21 You testified earlier about the
22 interaction of the Residential Low-Income
23 Assistance Program, RLIAP, with the Fuel
24 Assistance Program, which you referred to as

1 FAP. And you suggested that there are
2 specific circumstances that confront specific
3 customers who are eligible and that those
4 circumstances dictated whether the 35 percent
5 approach proposed by the Staff originally is
6 not as good as the 45 percent discount that's
7 reflected in the settlement agreement. And I
8 wonder if you might elaborate on that just a
9 little bit so that it's really clear why we
10 moved to 45 rather than 35.

11 A. (Chattopadhyay) Certainly. What I stated
12 previously -- that is, the greater the
13 expense in winter is, the better the
14 45 percent approach is relative to the
15 35 percent approach -- still generally holds.
16 Given how FAP is implemented, to my
17 understanding, with 24 combinations of FAP
18 credits allowed, based on actual gas
19 expenditures, there can be situations where,
20 relative to where things stand now for
21 existing customers, some may jump from a
22 higher FAP credit tier to a lower FAP credit
23 tier more easily under the 45 percent
24 discount winter-only approach compared to the

1 35 percent discount year-round approach. I
2 believe that should not, however, deter us
3 from pursuing what is the right approach
4 policy-wise. While I believe that it helps
5 that the overall New Hampshire benefits
6 coming from the federally administered FAP
7 remain intact, regardless of which approach
8 we implement, I do not believe it is helpful
9 to be in an overly reactive mode to the FAP
10 program as it currently stands. I would
11 strongly support we first do what is
12 policy-wise the right thing to do within the
13 RLIAP program.

14 MR. KREIS: Thank you. Those are
15 all of my questions for Dr. Chattopadhyay.
16 And if I'm not mistaken, that now makes the
17 witnesses available to the Commissioners for
18 their questions.

19 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. I just
20 want to confirm, though, that no one does
21 have any cross-examination. So I'll run
22 through this.

23 Mr. LaPanne, do you have any
24 questions you wanted to ask?

1 MS. LAPANNE: I do not.

2 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay.

3 Mr. Tower?

4 MR. TOWER: I do not.

5 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: All right. Mr.
6 Kreis, it sounds like you do not.

7 MR. KREIS: Correct.

8 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Let's see. Mr.
9 Taylor.

10 MR. TAYLOR: I do not. Thanks.

11 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Mr.
12 Sheehan?

13 MR. SHEEHAN: No, thank you.

14 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Excellent.

15 And Ms. Schwarzer.

16 MS. SCHWARZER: No, thank you.

17 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: All right.

18 Thank you.

19 Commissioner Bailey.

20 INTERROGATORIES BY COMMISSIONERS:

21 BY COMMISSIONER BAILEY:

22 Q. Thank you. Good morning.

23 I think I'll start with you, Mr. Iqbal.

24 My recollection was when you -- I think it

1 was you who testified in the gas rate case
2 that the original program costs, for let's
3 use EnergyNorth as an example, was supposed
4 to be .71 percent of their gross revenue. In
5 actuality, the cost of the program was
6 1.34 percent of their gross revenue. And one
7 of the things that you were trying to do was
8 look at whether that cost was reasonable; is
9 that correct?

10 A. (Iqbal) Yes. When we started this whole
11 process, that was one of our concern, yes.

12 Q. Did you address that concern, or did you
13 reallocate the full 1.34 percent of the gross
14 revenue?

15 A. (Iqbal) In this particular docket, we didn't
16 address that concern. But we kept that issue
17 open in the settlement, that we'll be talking
18 about the program design and cost issues in
19 2021. We took this, as Mr. Chattopadhyay
20 already mentioned, that we were in urgency to
21 do something for this winter. So we didn't
22 complete all our analysis and address all of
23 our issues in this particular docket, just to
24 make sure that low-income customers get their

1 benefit this winter during this COVID
2 pandemic.

3 So you are right, that we didn't address
4 that issue. But that issue will be discussed
5 in future cost of gas docket or maybe another
6 docket like this.

7 Q. Okay. Thank you.

8 So I guess I would ask each of the
9 panelists if they believe that the program
10 costs that are expected from this change are
11 reasonable. And we'll start with Mr. Iqbal.

12 A. (Iqbal) At this moment, yes, because we
13 didn't go into the details of the program
14 cost. There could be different reason for
15 the program cost, different for different
16 utilities, depending on their customer base,
17 and because it is recovered from all
18 customers, like C&I customers, depending on
19 the company's C&I customer usage and
20 residential customer usage, too. So there
21 are lots of issues which can impact the
22 overall cost of the program. It's not -- we
23 cannot pinpoint that, okay, because of this
24 particular company the cost is higher or this

1 particular company the cost is lower. That's
2 not that simple. We have to look into the
3 details of the difference, their background,
4 and how they qualify for these programs. So
5 without going into that level of details at
6 this moment and looking at the historical
7 costs of this program, we are comfortable at
8 this moment at the level of cost we see now.

9 Q. Is it possible that this reallocation will
10 change the cost, either increase or decrease
11 the cost, and is that something that you have
12 to study?

13 A. (Iqbal) We did that part. Because if you
14 look at my testimony, particularly
15 attachments, we're showing that the current
16 level of -- one of the goal of our settlement
17 was that not to reduce the benefit low-income
18 customers are getting right now. So we
19 calculated how much they are getting, on
20 average what is the benefit they're getting,
21 and we found it was 35 percent approximately.
22 So our initial proposal was 35 percent. That
23 doesn't increase the cost, depending on
24 participation level. If participation level

1 is the same, cost will not increase. But if
2 you look at our settlement, the 45 percent
3 discount for winter only, the goal was to
4 keep that cost at the same level. So
5 overall, this settlement is not increasing
6 the cost for the program.

7 Q. Thank you very much.

8 Dr. Chattopadhyay, do you --
9 (connectivity issue)

10 (Court Reporter interrupts.)

11 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: I asked Dr.
12 Chattopadhyay if he believes the cost of the
13 program is reasonable at this time.

14 A. (Chattopadhyay) Should I proceed?

15 Yes, I do. But I also understand what
16 Mr. Al-Azad Iqbal just mentioned. I mean,
17 this is not the end of the process. We will
18 continue to take a look at it again. Because
19 of the change in the program, we will go back
20 and see how things were in '20-'21 winter.
21 And that is important to do, because anytime
22 you make a change, customers might behave
23 differently. So you might end up seeing some
24 changes in the cost. But to me, that's just

1 one side of the information. I am convinced
2 that with the change we have proposed, fixing
3 the program to be focused only on winter,
4 that brings in benefits that, in terms of
5 economic efficiency, would make it sensible
6 to proceed with what we are proposing here.
7 But I would certainly add that, going
8 forward, we aren't just going to be, you
9 know, sitting on what we have already found.
10 We will actually continue our analysis.

11 Q. Thank you.

12 And Ms. Tebbetts, could you answer the
13 question, whether you believe that the costs
14 are reasonable. And also a follow-up on that
15 is will your rates need to change as a
16 result?

17 A. (Tebbetts) So we do believe the costs are
18 reasonable. With regards to the rates
19 changing, there will be a new calculation
20 should the customer be receiving a 45 percent
21 discount on the cost of gas portion as well
22 as the distribution portion; whereas, the
23 program prior had a 60 percent discount, but
24 only on the distribution. So the rates will

1 change. And I don't know what those rates
2 will be as of yet, simply because it won't be
3 effective until our November winter rates.
4 But there will be a change.

5 Q. I meant do you think that you'll have to
6 change other rates to collect the appropriate
7 amount of money to recover the program costs,
8 or will the existing rates cover the program
9 costs since they are unexpected to change
10 right now?

11 A. (Tebbetts) I don't know, off the top of my
12 head. We haven't done the analysis yet.
13 We're still working through this. But I
14 would suggest that any change could affect
15 other rates as well.

16 Q. I see you, Mr. Iqbal. Let me just ask her
17 one follow-up.

18 So when would those rate changes be
19 discussed?

20 A. (Tebbetts) Well, since there are two pieces
21 of this now, cost of gas and distribution, we
22 did just file a new distribution rate case
23 for EnergyNorth last week. So the
24 distribution piece of it we would discuss

1 through our rate case. With regards to the
2 cost of gas piece of it, we would be
3 discussing that through the cost of gas
4 proceeding that we will be filing I believe
5 in late August, early September.

6 Q. Okay. Thank you.

7 Mr. Iqbal.

8 A. (Iqbal) Just to explain what Ms. Tebbetts
9 said, that these rates are reset every
10 November. It is reconciled. So whether we
11 change the program or not, it will be reset.
12 And it will be resetting every year. So
13 depending on the participation level and
14 overall cost of our customer benefit, they
15 will be forecasting the future participation
16 and cost and dividing that by the forecasted
17 sales number; so that way, the company is
18 recovering all their cost, and it is
19 reconciled. So the whole point I was trying
20 to point out, that this rate changes every
21 year.

22 Q. Thank you very much.

23 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: Okay. I
24 think that's all I have, Madam Chair.

1 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
2 you.

3 Commissioner Giaimo, do you have
4 questions?

5 COMMISSIONER GIAIMO: I do have a
6 few.

7 BY COMMISSIONER GIAIMO:

8 Q. So in doing what is requested in the
9 settlement, are we creating a situation where
10 we are putting other benefits at risk for
11 low-income citizens? That's open to the
12 panel. So, Mr. Iqbal.

13 A. (Iqbal) We looked at that. As Dr.
14 Chattopadhyay also mentioned a little bit,
15 that the other benefit we looked at is FAP,
16 Fuel Assistance Program, and because the Fuel
17 Assistance Program has 24 tiers. So
18 depending on where they are right now, and
19 what they will be under the new proposal,
20 there might be some people who will be paying
21 more than the other, than their existing
22 bills.

23 I give you an example. If you look at
24 the tiers, the FAP tiers has 100 to 600 --

1 (Court Reporter interrupts.)

2 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Mr. Iqbal, can
3 you pause for a moment? Ms. Robidas has a
4 question.

5 MR. IQBAL: Okay.

6 (Pause)

7 A. (Iqbal) The tier system of the Fuel
8 Assistance Program is going from 100 to 600,
9 601 to 900, 901 to 1200, and 1201 and above.
10 If you look at one particular customer, the
11 customers who are on the margins of these
12 tiers, they will be impacted depending on
13 whether we are -- based on what they are
14 getting now, what will be proposed, 35
15 percent and 45 percent.

16 I give you an example. Let's assume
17 somebody's bill, their heating bill was \$900.
18 And under the FAP program, the amount of
19 assistance they will be getting is \$945. So
20 if the discount we are proposing is
21 increasing his or her bill about \$900 --
22 sorry -- yeah, then the benefit from FAP goes
23 up almost \$157. But if you reverse that,
24 let's assume under 35 percent discount rate,

1 or current discount rate, somebody's winter
2 bill is -- sorry about that notification --
3 So, \$900. He or she will be getting about
4 \$709 of Fuel Assistance Program. But let's
5 assume that somebody's bill is now \$901.
6 They will be getting \$945 of FAP benefit. At
7 35 percent, and moving to 45 percent, that
8 bill number will be reducing from \$901 to
9 something below 900. We can assume that.
10 That 10 percent difference will reduce his
11 overall bill. Then his or her benefit will
12 be reduced from \$945 to \$709. So those
13 people who are on the margin of FAP program
14 design -- which has nothing to do with our
15 program design, and we don't control that
16 either -- there might be some customers who
17 have having this difference of their bill.
18 But we don't know how many customers will be
19 impacted for this particular reason because
20 we don't have all these details, all the
21 participants' accounts and their details. So
22 there is no -- from our perspective, we don't
23 know that. And it is almost impossible to
24 know that, depending on who is participating

1 and who is not participating. And that is
2 one of the problem we always have when we
3 deal with the tier system, that on the margin
4 people might get benefit, people might lose
5 benefit.

6 Q. Mr. Iqbal, thank you for that. I understand
7 the connection and kind of the dynamics that
8 go on between the Fuel Assistance Program and
9 this program. I guess I also wonder, would
10 the savings here be considered a benefit
11 which might hurt or adversely affect, you
12 know, rental assistance and other
13 governmental assistances, and had that been
14 considered?

15 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Commissioner
16 Giaimo, before you move on, Mr. Chattopadhyay
17 had his hand raised to respond to your first
18 question.

19 BY COMMISSIONER GIAIMO:

20 Q. Okay. And if you understood the second
21 question, maybe you can opine on that as
22 well.

23 A. (Chattopadhyay) Yeah. Let me first just
24 follow up on what Mr. Al-Azad Iqbal just

1 talked about.

2 So it's really a question of what I had
3 discussed with our -- or what I said
4 initially in response to the questions that
5 Don Kreis was asking me. You have to also
6 be, you know, cognizant of the fact that the
7 money is supposed to be used for heating
8 customers. And the way this interplay is
9 showing up, the ones that Iqbal -- that
10 Mr. Al-Azad Iqbal was talking about, it's
11 happening because the customers are getting
12 some of the assistance in summer, and they
13 are actually hiding, you know, their sort of
14 benefit they're getting from RLIAP and ending
15 up getting more benefit from FAP. So there
16 is that issue of trying to address the
17 movement away from summer to winter, which is
18 a good thing. And that will help, you know,
19 given the fact that the money stays with New
20 Hampshire customers, with the limited
21 resources we have. The money will actually
22 help the customers who in fact need the
23 financial assistance for heating. So I'm not
24 too concerned about those specific cases. I

1 mean, so that's No. 1.

2 And for the second piece, to be
3 honest, I mean, I have not analyzed all of
4 the details. I don't know whether I have the
5 information to be able to do it. But for
6 sure, one of the considerations we had was,
7 you know, this docket started two months
8 before the COVID-19 reality kicked in. So
9 you have to understand that helping the
10 customers during the winter with a 45 percent
11 discount is going to be very helpful to those
12 customers who are facing hardship.

13 So I understand the point you're
14 making. But the overall analysis is always
15 done for the entire year. So what we are
16 talking about is winter plus summer. But if
17 you focus on just maybe winter, the
18 possibility that it's a better move is even
19 greater. And I'm still agreeing to what
20 Iqbal was -- what Mr. Al-Azad Iqbal was
21 talking about. There might be situations
22 where it doesn't play out exactly the way we
23 would like it to. But that's really -- it's
24 an interplay between the FAP program and the

1 RLIAP program. I think we need to do what is
2 right for us and then proceed into the
3 future. And the future, again, as I talked
4 about, there are benefits that the method
5 that we have proposed here, you know, will
6 bring about.

7 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Commissioner
8 Giaimo, I'm sorry to interrupt. Mr. Tower
9 had his hand up. Are you having an issue,
10 Mr. Tower?

11 MR. TOWER: I was not. And I know
12 I'm not a panelist to be able to answer these
13 questions. But as a staff attorney at New
14 Hampshire Legal Assistance, I have --
15 (connectivity issue)

16 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Let me just
17 have you hold on for a second, Mr. Tower.

18 Commissioner Giaimo, would you like
19 to hear from Mr. Tower now or wait, and we
20 can have him give his summary at the end?

21 COMMISSIONER GIAIMO: Well, it
22 seems like Mr. Tower has something on his
23 mind. And since we're on point here, I
24 certainly would be happy to hear from him, as

1 well as Mr. Iqbal. Looks like he wants to be
2 put in the queue as well.

3 Mr. Tower, you understand my larger
4 question, right, of other potential benefits?
5 And to the extent that the parties are
6 meeting afterwards and trying to educate, you
7 know, I guess my suggestion would be to
8 impart as much as possible the need to be
9 cognizant of accepting benefits and how they
10 may have an effect on other benefits. And
11 that's something that would need to be
12 considered going forward. But I would
13 certainly like to hear from you on this, Mr.
14 Tower.

15 MR. TOWER: Well, New Hampshire
16 Legal Assistance in the past has looked at
17 how changes in discounts or changes to the
18 structure of benefits can affect other
19 low-income, need-based benefits that are out
20 there, including housing benefits, food
21 stamps, unemployment benefits, everything
22 that's out there. And in the past, we had
23 concluded that if the benefit is a discount,
24 it is -- it generally does not affect a wide

1 variety of programs in the same way as a
2 benefit that was paid as a cash payment, that
3 they were then to use on benefits.

4 So it's my opinion as a staff
5 attorney handling benefits here at New
6 Hampshire Legal Assistance that a change to a
7 discount percentage of residential --
8 (connectivity issue)

9 (Court Reporter interrupts.)

10 MR. TOWER: Sorry. A change to the
11 discount percentage of the residential
12 low-income gas assistance program is not
13 going to have far-reaching, unforeseen
14 consequences on other public benefits that
15 low-income households may receive. The only
16 one that I identified as something that would
17 be impacted would be fuel assistance, which
18 we've discussed already today.

19 COMMISSIONER GIAIMO: Attorney
20 Tower, thank you. That was very helpful.

21 Mr. Iqbal.

22 A. (Iqbal) The short answer of your question is
23 we did look into that, what Mr. Tower
24 described. That gives us a comfort that it's

1 not going to happen. But on this, I think we
2 are also -- Staff is also concerned about
3 that, that if we change this winter-only
4 discount, how that impacts the other
5 benefits. And we later figured out that the
6 Fuel Assistance Program, the way it is done,
7 is it is a grant to the state. So even if a
8 gas customer is not getting -- or getting a
9 little bit less benefit from Fuel Assistance
10 Program, but overall they will be getting the
11 same level of benefit, but it might reduce
12 some of the program assistance benefit, but
13 increase the gas assistance program we are
14 talking about. But the rest of the money, as
15 Mr. Chattopadhyay already mentioned, that
16 will be within the state. This is not going
17 away from the state or returning to somewhere
18 else. It will be within the state other
19 customers will get that benefit anyway. So
20 it all depends on customer to customer
21 circumstances. So that might be the case,
22 that somebody might get benefit, higher
23 benefit or lower benefit. But overall, I
24 agree with Mr. Tower that it will not change

1 their overall benefit significantly.

2 Q. Thank you. I'm going to move on to a
3 different subject matter or different line of
4 questions.

5 Mr. Iqbal, in your testimony you provide
6 some historical context. Maybe you can
7 enlighten me as to what the justification was
8 in 2006 from the shift from its initial to
9 the next wave of benefits and savings. What
10 was the reason behind that? Do you know?

11 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Just a minute.
12 I'm sorry to interrupt. Ms. Tebbetts, we
13 just lost the video. Oh, there you are.
14 Great. Go ahead.

15 BY COMMISSIONER GIAIMO:

16 Q. I'm sorry. Do I need to repeat the question?

17 A. (Iqbal) Yeah, please.

18 Q. Okay. What I said, or what I was trying to
19 get at, was in your testimony you provide
20 historical context for the program. And my
21 understanding, based on your testimony, was
22 it basically started in 2005. And then in
23 2006 there were some changes, the changes
24 that increased savings and increased the

1 total benefits provided. Do you know why
2 that happened?

3 A. (Iqbal) I reviewed those documents earlier.
4 But as long as I remember, those changes were
5 done because of the market condition at that
6 time. The cost, the gas cost, was much
7 higher. And the participation level was
8 higher, too. And that level, just like we
9 are facing right now with the COVID
10 situation, that it was not a normal situation
11 at that time in the context of gas cost and
12 overall heating cost for customers. So at
13 that time, although at the start was a little
14 bit low, in the next year it was raised to
15 higher level. And one of the consideration
16 was that the cost, overall program cost was
17 below one percent at that time. So they
18 determined that they can expand the benefit a
19 little bit without going beyond one percent.

20 Q. Okay. So the market conditions were such
21 that the price of gas went up -- and I think
22 this is probably in or around Katrina or
23 Rita, and kind of a restriction on Gulf gas
24 and creating higher prices. Okay. That's

1 helpful.

2 So market prices now are more -- better
3 resemble the 2005 than the 2006-2007 market,
4 so Staff is recommending using the '05
5 program instead of the '06, '07, '08 program?

6 A. (Iqbal) I haven't compared the market
7 situation with recent years and 2005 numbers.
8 But the cost of gas portion, it was much
9 higher at that time. And right now the cost
10 of gas portion is much lower. At that time I
11 think cost of gas was much higher than
12 50 percent. Right now it is 33 percent or
13 around that area. So the discount was
14 applied to the delivering rates only of gas
15 at that time. But delivery rate went up, but
16 cost of gas went down, so overall benefit
17 went up percentage-wise. So it is difficult
18 to compare this program to 2006 or 2005 and
19 right now what we are doing.

20 As I think we mention in our initial
21 letter, that the market situation changed,
22 and the combination of delivery rates and
23 cost of gas rates also changed. So based on
24 those data, we thought that the current

1 program needs to be changed, and we settled
2 on this program.

3 Q. All right. That's very helpful. In numerous
4 places, at least on Page 4, and probably
5 other places, I saw the terminology "market
6 conditions," and I just needed clarification
7 as to what in fact you meant by that. And I
8 certainly understand it now. So thank you
9 for that clarification.

10 Is it fair to say it sounds like the
11 analysis was done on what type of programs
12 are being offered in other states and in
13 other affiliates? Is it fair to say that the
14 program being proposed would look similar to
15 what our neighboring states and what the
16 affiliates are doing?

17 A. (Iqbal) The programs in other states
18 particularly provided those information.
19 Based on the information which said that New
20 Hampshire program right now would be one of
21 the most generous program in what we know so
22 far.

23 Q. Okay. So it's generous. But is it fairly
24 consistent with what the other states are

1 doing, or is it significantly more generous?

2 A. (Iqbal) I'd say more generous, not
3 significantly, because we saw that other
4 states have different level of discount, from
5 30 percent, 25 percent, 20 percent, winter
6 only, those type of programs. So 45 is at
7 the high end of the discount I looked at,
8 what I looked at already. So I would say
9 that it is generous. But most generous? I
10 don't know.

11 Q. Okay. But in light of the pandemic and other
12 things, you find these to be just and
13 reasonable and appropriate going forward;
14 right?

15 A. (Iqbal) Yes, I do.

16 Q. My last question gets to timing. So forgive
17 me for forgetting when cost of gas filings
18 are done. I think they're done in the fall.
19 Are they done again in the spring? I don't
20 think so. It's a once-a-year filing;
21 correct?

22 A. (Iqbal) Yes, it is. I think for EnergyNorth,
23 they file it -- I'm not sure. I haven't
24 looked at it. And I think Northern will be

1 filing in a couple of weeks, I think.

2 Q. Okay. So one of the ways to continually
3 review this would be through the cost of gas
4 proceedings. So it's safe to say that we
5 wouldn't be able to again review this in
6 light of winter experience until this time
7 next year, 2021, is that correct --

8 A. (Iqbal) Correct.

9 Q. -- when we get the 2021 cost of gas case.

10 All right. Okay. Thank you all for
11 your time. Those are all the questions I
12 have.

13 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. And all
14 of my questions have been answered. So I'm
15 wondering whether -- Ms. Schwarzer.

16 MS. SCHWARZER: Would it be
17 possible for me to ask Mr. Iqbal a follow-up
18 question?

19 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Yes.

20 REDIRECT EXAMINATION OF AL-AZAD IQBAL

21 BY MS. SCHWARZER:

22 Q. Mr. Iqbal, I'd like to address your attention
23 to Attachment 2 to your testimony. And with
24 regard to program costs, could you explain

1 what Attachment 2 shows.

2 A. (Iqbal) Yeah, Attachment 2 has two important
3 pieces of information. One is the program
4 cost and one is the impact on the customer's
5 bill. I know the threshold of the benchmark
6 in 2006 said one person on both, that looking
7 at whether the customer bill is impacted --
8 (connectivity issue)

9 (Court Reporter interrupts.)

10 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Mr. Iqbal,
11 pause for a moment, please. Ms. Robidas.

12 (Pause)

13 A. (Iqbal) The threshold or benchmark in 2006
14 was set for both of these costs, most of
15 these factors. One is whether it is
16 one percent of the company's revenue or
17 whether the bill impact is more than one
18 percent or not. So that's why we looked at
19 last three years of data, how it -- what is
20 the impact on the revenue, the second to last
21 column. And the last column is what is
22 impact on a typical customer's bill.

23 If you look at the typical customer
24 bill, it is still under one percent, but only

1 for EnergyNorth for the last few years. The
2 program cost is a little bit more than
3 one percent.

4 Q. And do you anticipate that with maintaining
5 the discount value, even though the rate
6 change, the method of applying the benefit is
7 different, do you anticipate that next year's
8 cost will be roughly equivalent to what we
9 see in Attachment 2?

10 A. (Iqbal) It will be equivalent if
11 participation level is the same. But we are
12 expecting that because of COVID, the
13 participation level rate will be higher. And
14 based on how high it goes, the cost will be
15 higher, too.

16 Q. Thank you. And if you go back to Staff
17 recommendation, which is marked Exhibit 1,
18 with regard to the historical change from the
19 2005 program, the 2006 program -- and you may
20 have said this already, so in more detail --
21 basically the change was made in 2006 to
22 provide an increased benefit to participants
23 because the number of participants was lower
24 than expected at that time; is that correct?

1 A. (Iqbal) That is correct. That's one of the
2 reason that overall cost was not as high as
3 or didn't go near from the benchmark.

4 Q. And you were describing change at that time.
5 Supply rate and distribution rate were closer
6 to each other. And since that time, the
7 supply rate has fallen and the distribution
8 rate has taken up a larger share; is that
9 correct?

10 A. (Iqbal) Yes, that is correct. The
11 distribution rate increased and the cost of
12 gas supply rates decreased in recent years.

13 Q. Thank you. I have no further question.

14 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
15 you.

16 Mr. Sheehan, it looks like you have
17 some follow-up?

18 MR. SHEEHAN: Thank you.

19 REDIRECT EXAMINATION OF HEATHER TEBBETTS

20 BY MR. SHEEHAN:

21 Q. Ms. Tebbetts, just one clarification on
22 Commissioner Bailey's question about change
23 in rates. Do you have a clarification on how
24 the Company collects and pays the discount?

1 A. (Tebbetts) Yes. What we're going to do is
2 we're going to estimate both the distribution
3 and cost of gas shortfalls based on the RLIAP
4 in the winter cost of gas recovery through
5 the LDAC. The portion of the gas program in
6 the LDAC will include projected cost during
7 the 2020 and 2021 winter period, plus the
8 prior year true-up. And the LDAC will be
9 effective November 1st, 2020 through
10 October 31st, 2021.

11 Q. And this is how the Company has addressed
12 this program in years past, that it collects
13 the amount of benefits through a portion of
14 the LDAC charge.

15 A. (Tebbetts) Yes, that's correct.

16 Q. Thank you.

17 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Mr.
18 Kreis, did you have any follow-up?

19 MR. KREIS: I do not, Madam
20 Chairwoman.

21 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
22 you. All right. With that, then, the
23 witnesses are excused.

24 And we will strike I.D. on the

1 exhibits without objection. Exhibits 1
2 through 4 are admitted as full exhibits.

3 Anything else we need to do before
4 the parties sum up?

5 [No verbal response]

6 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Seeing
7 none, Mr. Kreis, would you like to start?

8 MR. KREIS: I'd be delighted to
9 start. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

10 I have listened carefully to the
11 testimony this morning, particularly the
12 testimony that was elicited via questions
13 from the Commissioners. And I remain
14 convinced, and the Office of the Consumer
15 Advocate remains convinced, that the
16 Commission should approve the settlement
17 agreement as it has been presented to you.

18 The Commission should remember that
19 this docket opened at the request of Staff,
20 which has long believed that the current
21 design of the Residential Low-Income
22 Assistance Program requires, I guess I would
23 call it a reboot, in light of the fact that
24 the original program was designed more than a

1 decade ago. And given the way natural gas
2 prices and rates have changed, it just
3 doesn't work effectively in terms of the size
4 of the discount.

5 In the face of that challenge,
6 rather than oppose Staff's efforts to
7 essentially roll back lower income assistance
8 benefits to natural gas customers who need
9 it, Dr. Chattopadhyay, in particular, took a
10 look at the program and put his thinking cap
11 on. And I think it's fair to say that the
12 idea that is before you today originated with
13 him. We were able to present it to the other
14 parties. And low and behold, we convinced
15 them that what we were suggesting is a good
16 idea. It's obviously true that the new
17 program design that we're proposing doesn't
18 inevitably mean that every single natural gas
19 customer will be better off than they would
20 have been under some other program design.
21 But I think the parties here have indicated,
22 and we certainly are committed, to an
23 ongoing, continual look at this program, so
24 that if it is implemented along the lines

1 described in the settlement agreement, our
2 work isn't done. And if the program doesn't
3 work as intended, or if there is some better
4 way of doing this kind of -- providing this
5 kind of assistance, we will be before you
6 proposing requisite changes. We won't wait
7 until there is a cost of gas proceeding that
8 makes for a convenient opportunity. We'll
9 come back before the Commission immediately
10 and say we think this program needs to be
11 approved in this way to do a better job of
12 serving the state's low-income natural gas
13 customers.

14 What we have here is a really
15 excellent idea, because at a time of
16 particular crisis, meaning a time when all of
17 the utility customers in the state are
18 especially stressed economically and
19 physically, particularly low-income
20 customers, it makes sense to target the
21 available assistance into the winter months
22 when conditions are extreme, when all natural
23 gas customers are maximally reliant on their
24 natural gas service, and naturally low-income

1 customers are at the greatest degree of need
2 when it comes to help paying their natural
3 gas bills.

4 So on behalf of residential utility
5 customers, I commend this settlement
6 agreement to your favorable attention. And I
7 thank the witnesses for their testimony.

8 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Thank you.

9 Mr. Tower, did you want to sum up?

10 MR. TOWER: I will just state that
11 on behalf of The Way Home, The Way Home, upon
12 reviewing the proposal that was originally
13 proposed by the Office of the Consumer
14 Advocate, one of the added benefits that they
15 see for their client base, which is
16 low-income households, is the effect of
17 creating a bit more balance between high
18 winter heating bills and the generally much
19 lower gas bills of the summer, non-heating
20 season. And they believe that having less of
21 a dramatic jump twice a year between what the
22 gas bill is in summer and what it is in
23 winter will allow low-income households to
24 better manage their finances and cause them

1 to be less likely to fall into arrears on
2 their gas bills. And we support this
3 settlement.

4 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
5 you.

6 Ms. LaPanne.

7 MS. LAPANNE: I have nothing to
8 add, other than that I agree as well.

9 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
10 you.

11 Mr. Taylor.

12 MR. TAYLOR: Thank you. Northern
13 was happy to be a part of this proceeding.
14 We had a series of collaborative technical
15 sessions that I think went very well and have
16 yielded a settlement or joint proposal that
17 is just and reasonable and should be approved
18 by the Commission. I regret that technical
19 difficulties prevented us from being
20 available to you today, but the other
21 witnesses certainly did a commendable job
22 explaining the joint proposal.

23 So as I said, we support it. It is
24 just and reasonable, and we recommend

1 approval. Thanks.

2 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: All right.

3 Thank you.

4 Mr. Sheehan.

5 MR. SHEEHAN: Thank you. And I'll
6 echo what Mr. Taylor just said. This was a
7 meaningful review of the program, a good step
8 to improving the program. As all parties
9 have indicated, we will likely revisit it
10 next year, after having gone through a winter
11 as is, unless Mr. Kreis sees an urgent need
12 to tweak it. And we ask that the Commission
13 approve the settlement agreement. Thank you.

14 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: All right.

15 Thank you.

16 And Ms. Schwarzer.

17 MS. SCHWARZER: Thank you, Madam
18 Chairwoman. The parties have engaged in
19 extensive discovery and discussion. The
20 Staff issued two sets of data requests to the
21 utilities and the Community Action agencies,
22 and all parties participated in four
23 technical sessions. It was not Staff's
24 intent in any way to roll back benefits to

1 low-income customers, so I'm sorry that the
2 OCA had that perception. But I think our
3 proposed settlement as a group speaks for
4 itself and clearly provides continued
5 benefits and a better rate structure. If
6 approved, the benefits will remain consistent
7 with the present level of RLIAP benefits.

8 Staff wishes to thank and commend
9 the OCA, New Hampshire Legal Assistance, The
10 Way Home, and the Community Action agencies
11 for their hard work and their significant
12 contributions to the settlement agreement.
13 Our discussions were wide-ranging, and Staff
14 appreciates the number crunching and thinking
15 outside the box that this joint proposal
16 represents.

17 On the day of the prehearing
18 conference, the Governor declared a state of
19 emergency with regard to the novel
20 coronavirus and COVID-19, and this led our
21 work to focus on changes that can be
22 implemented for the start of the winter
23 season and resulted in the parties requesting
24 an accelerated hearing date. If acceptable

1 to the Commission, the utilities are prepared
2 to implement the proposed modifications by
3 November 1, 2020 if they have an order issued
4 by the end of August.

5 In sum, Staff supports the proposed
6 settlement agreement without reservation and
7 hopes the Commission will conclude that the
8 request for modifications should be approved.
9 Thank you.

10 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: All right.
11 With that, we will close the record. Thank
12 you, everyone. We'll take this matter under
13 advisement, and the hearing is adjourned.

14 (Hearing adjourned at 11:31 a.m.)
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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Susan J. Robidas, a Licensed Shorthand Court Reporter and Notary Public of the State of New Hampshire, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and accurate transcript of my stenographic notes of these proceedings taken at the place and on the date hereinbefore set forth, to the best of my skill and ability under the conditions present at the time.

I further certify that I am neither attorney or counsel for, nor related to or employed by any of the parties to the action; and further, that I am not a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed in this case, nor am I financially interested in this action.

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