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October 20, 2014

Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission
89 Jefferson Boulevard
Warwick, RI 02888
ATTN: Chairwoman Margaret Curran

Dear Honorable Commissioners,

The George Wiley Center would like to request your instituting an emergency regulation for LIHEAP-eligible utility customers in the state of Rhode Island in order to restore service or avoid termination as the cold weather approaches this season.

Specifically, we suggest that residential customers would be able to restore service or avoid disconnection with a 10% down payment and an agreement for the remaining balance to be repaid over 36 months. Payment plans that include unaffordable down payments and short repayment terms are destined to fail because they are simply not affordable to many economically struggling households. Furthermore, when down payment requirements are unreasonably high, limited federal LIHEAP funds are more quickly depleted by customers who need crisis grants, lowering the amount available to other LIHEAP recipients through primary grants.

It is important to note that previously-adopted emergency restoration rules have included barriers to households that were in a similar economic predicament in previous years. The George Wiley Center strongly encourages you to omit such language that would prohibit a customer from being eligible based on previous enrollment. Since most of the LIHEAP crisis grants go directly to National Grid, the dominant regulated utility in the state, it is in the best interest of all ratepayers (and particularly all very-low-income ratepayers), to ensure that limited resources are most fairly applied. If customers who were previously enrolled are in need of higher crisis grant amounts, this once again leads to lower primary grants for customers who have managed to keep their accounts from threat of disconnection, which is inherently unfair.

We ask that you take into account the still-stagnant economy and continuing high unemployment in Rhode Island, and that you take quick action to assist our neighbors who suffer when their ability to survive the elements and live with some measure of dignity is threatened.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sincerely, Henry Shelton".

Director



George Wiley Center
32 East Avenue
Pawtucket, Rhode Island 02860
Tel: 401.728.5555
Fax: 401.725.1020
georgewileycenter@gmail.com

