



The monthly bulletin of the Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN)

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- **LIEN receives Ontario Trillium Foundation funding & welcomes new full-time Coordinator**

The Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN) is delighted to announce that it has its first full-time paid Coordinator, thanks to a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Zee Bhanji has a B.A. from McGill University and an M.A. from Dalhousie University. She has just moved to Toronto from Halifax where she coordinated research projects in the areas of equity, youth and women. Previously, Zee worked in Kenya doing community development work and research in poverty/youth/health areas. Zee will be working out of the office of the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO), and her contact information is provided at the bottom of this bulletin - the first of regular, monthly updates that will be sent to LIEN members.

- **Register now for the May 26th LIEN/AHAC Annual Conference**

LIEN's 2nd Annual Conference is being held jointly with the Affordable Housing Action Committee of Peterborough (AHAC), and is co-sponsored by the Peterborough Community Legal Centre (PCLC) and the Community Counselling & Resource Centre (CCRC). The preliminary agenda for the conference, and a registration form, is available on the LIEN website.

There is no charge to attend the conference and the agenda will be very useful for connecting income security, energy poverty, and energy sustainability issues.

- **Ontario Energy Affordability Program for Low-Income Households: LIEN releases proposal**

On May 1st, the new electricity and distribution rate increases approved by the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) went into effect. Yet, there is no permanent rate assistance program in place for Ontario's low-income consumers who are vulnerable to increases in shelter and utility costs and may be forced to make difficult choices between heating, eating and paying the rent.

A proposal for a ratepayer-funded **Ontario Home Energy Affordability Program** has been developed for LIEN and filed at the OEB in a gas distribution rate hearing. The proposal, which is available on LIEN's website, has five major components: rate affordability, arrears management, crisis intervention, conservation and demand management, and consumer protections. It advocates that Ontario's low-income consumers should not be paying more than 6% of their total household income on energy.

- **Cancelled: federal EnerGuide for Low-Income Households program**

The federal government has quietly axed a program to help low-income households cope with high energy costs and cut greenhouse gas emissions, just as delivery was getting underway. EnerGuide for Low Income Houses (EGLIH) was a \$500 million, 5 year program designed to assist 130,000 households. It was introduced with all-party support in November 2005. Without EGLIH, Canada will have no strategy to protect low-income households from escalating energy prices, and no strategy to engage these households in the effort to reduce energy-related pollution.

LIEN had been working with the Nova Scotia-based Affordable Energy Coalition (AEC) in proposing recommendations (available on the LIEN web site) to ensure maximum success in the federal government's delivery of EGLIH and is now engaged in the campaign to restore the program. More information about the

cut and the campaign is posted on the Green Communities Canada website:
www.greencommunitiescanada.ca

- **OPA/Conservation Bureau launch 1st phase of low-income conservation & demand management program**

In October 2005, the Minister of Energy issued a directive to the Ontario Power Authority (OPA) to assume responsibility for initiatives relating to energy conservation and demand-side management (CDM) for the low-income and social housing sectors, reducing consumption in this sector by up to 100MW. LIEN has been participating in the development of programs pursuant to this directive. In March 2006, LIEN made a presentation to the OPA's Board of Directors on rising energy costs and the impact on low-income consumers.

On March 28, 2006, the OPA's Conservation Bureau announced that it will invest up to \$9.25 million in energy efficient lighting and appliances for 5,000 social housing units. The first phase of the program will be primarily for providers already involved in Social Housing Services Corporation's (SHSC) Energy Management Program pilot. The funding will also enable SHSC to provide education and outreach to support a culture of conservation in social housing. LIEN issued a media release in support of this initiative and indicated that it was looking forward to the expansion of low-income CDM programs beyond the social housing sector. The media release is available on the LIEN website.

- **Smart Meters in rental housing: Bill 109 allows landlords to transfer utility bills directly to tenants**

LIEN, along with ACTO (one of LIEN's founding members), urged the Ontario government at the February 2006 public hearings on Bill 21, *Energy Conservation Responsibility Act, 2005*, not to proceed with the Smart Meter initiative and electricity sub-metering in the multi-residential rental sector. In May 2005, LIEN released **Zapping Tenants**, a report explaining in detail why sub-metering in the residential rental sector is not cost-effective, not an effective method to achieve the Ontario government's conservation goals, and not fair to tenants.

Bill 109, the *Residential Tenancies Act, 2006*, which was introduced on May 3rd, contains provisions which will allow landlords to install Smart Meters in existing rental units and transfer electricity costs directly to tenants who currently pay for the utility in their rent. While the bill also includes provisions for rent reductions for tenants and energy conservation obligations on landlords, details are to be worked out in regulations. Bill 109 can be accessed on the Ontario legislature website at:
http://www.ontla.on.ca/documents/Bills/38_Parliament/session2/index.htm

Shedding some light on the same subject, the Social Housing Services Corporation (SHSC) has released a study to evaluate the impact of the impending changes to electricity metering on social housing units, housing providers and tenants. The report, entitled *Electricity metering and social housing in Ontario*, is available at: <http://www.shscorp.ca/content/docs/shsc%20electricity%20metering%20report.pdf>

LIEN Currents is issued monthly by the Low-Income Energy Network for members and others interested in solutions to energy poverty in Ontario. For more information, contact Zee Bhanji at bhanjiz@lao.on.ca or 416-597-5855 ext. 5167. You can also visit our website at www.lowincomeenergy.ca

LIEN would like to express its appreciation to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for supporting this initiative

