



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

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- **OEB's releases three-part program for low-income energy consumers**

On March 10, 2009, the OEB announced the establishment of the new Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP) as the outcome of its consultation on low-income energy consumer issues in which LIEN actively participated last fall. LEAP has three components: temporary financial assistance for consumers in need; access to more flexible customer service rules on matters such as bill payment and disconnection notice periods; and targeted conservation and demand management programs.

The LEAP emergency energy fund totaling about \$5 million annually will be available year round on a consistent basis across the province, and will be provided by both electricity and gas energy providers together with social service agencies in each community. This will ensure that the program is available to low-income energy consumers in need all across Ontario.

Unfortunately, the Board decided against LIEN's recommendation of establishing a permanent energy rate affordability program for low-income consumers that would proactively prevent households from falling into arrears. The temporary financial assistance program is reactive, dealing with arrears after the fact. LIEN will continue its fight for a low-income rate assistance program. A LEAP implementation working group will be formed by the OEB with the goal of getting the LEAP in place by November 2009. For more information and to view LIEN's media release, please visit the LIEN website.

- **Proposed *Green Energy Act* holds promise for improved low-income conservation programs**

On February 23, 2009, *Bill 150 – Green Energy and Green Economy Act, 2009* was introduced in the Ontario legislature. LIEN was encouraged by provisions in the proposed *Green Energy Act (GEA)* that could adequately fund conservation programs designed to help low-income Ontarians significantly reduce their household energy use and bills. Programs to date have been limited to pilots, involved short-term funding commitments or have focused on less extensive measures such as low-flow showerheads, aerators, pipe wrap, programmable thermostats and CFL bulbs.

Bill 150 contains amendments to the *Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998* that require the OEB to collect assessments to fund conservation or renewable energy programs:

- aimed at reducing consumption of various fuels (natural gas, electricity, propane, oil, coal and wood), and
- aimed at a specific geographical, social, income or other sector of Ontario.

Other OEB Act amendments provide for Ministerial directives to the Ontario Energy Board to set conservation targets to be met by distributors and other licensees. LIEN anticipates that these new provisions in the OEB Act, plus the OEB's statement in its LEAP report that it wants to ensure that the appropriate level and type of energy conservation programs are available to low-income consumers, means real progress may finally be made in getting effective, province-wide, adequately funded programs in place. For more information and to view LIEN's media release, please visit the LIEN website.

- **Electricity sub-metering in apartment buildings halted**

On March 24th, 2009, the Ontario Energy Board's Chief Compliance Officer issued a compliance bulletin which effectively halted the installation of electricity sub-meters in multi-residential rental units. Below is the link to the compliance bulletin:

[http://www.oeb.gov.on.ca/OEB/Documents/Compliance/Compliance\\_Bulletin\\_200901.pdf](http://www.oeb.gov.on.ca/OEB/Documents/Compliance/Compliance_Bulletin_200901.pdf).

The compliance bulletin clarified that any electricity sub-meters installed in rental apartment buildings on or after November 3, 2005 were done without legal authority. The OEB has called for these activities, regulated under the *Electricity Act, 1998*, to cease immediately.

Currently, most rental apartment buildings in the province are bulk-metered for electricity service and tenants pay for the utility in their monthly rent. Thousands of tenants have been pressured into signing sub-metering contracts. In many cases, landlords have transferred electricity costs to the tenant without the tenant's consent. The rent reductions offered by landlords are often inadequate.

Since 2004, LIEN and the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (a steering committee and founding member of LIEN) have raised concerns about the adverse impacts of electricity sub-metering and smart meters with time-of-use pricing on housing affordability and security for low-income households/consumers.

- **Gas utilities consult on low-income energy conservation programs**

LIEN continues to work with Enbridge Gas Distribution and Union Gas on the progress of their low-income demand-side management (DSM) programs, particularly with public information and outreach about the programs as they are launched to assist the companies in meeting their client targets. In November 2008, Enbridge and Union had separate consultative sessions, designed to elicit feedback on their upcoming multi-year (2010 to 2012) DSM framework as well as to debrief stakeholders on the progress made in the current plans. LIEN attended both consultative meetings and made a case for increased spending on the low-income program, expansion of the low-income weatherization program, as well as targeting those most in need, namely, OW and ODSP recipients, the working poor, low-income seniors and others living on fixed incomes.

- **Energy poverty on agenda at OMSSA 2008 fall training seminar**

LIEN participated in a panel discussion on energy programs for low-income consumers which was held as part of an Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) workshop on December 1, 2008. OMSSA's fall training seminar is an annual gathering of front-line municipal social service staff as well as managers and directors of municipal social services. There was also a session with a focus on getting information out to staff on how to connect clients and families to low-income energy programs. The workshop focused on the issues that low-income families face and how municipalities and energy companies and other stakeholder can work together for the benefit of low-income families. LIEN gave an overview of energy poverty in Ontario and LIEN's advocacy for a comprehensive strategy to sustainably address the affordable energy needs of low-income consumers.

*LIEN Currents* is issued bi-monthly by the Low-Income Energy Network for members and others interested in solutions to energy poverty in Ontario. For more information, contact the LIEN Coordinator at [bhanjiz@lao.on.ca](mailto:bhanjiz@lao.on.ca) or 416-597-5855 ext. 5167 or toll-free at 1-866-245-4182 ext. 5167. You can also visit our website at [www.lowincomeenergy.ca](http://www.lowincomeenergy.ca)

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