



LIEN Currents

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

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- **LIEN's fight for low-income energy rates goes to Divisional Court**

In April 2007, the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) released a decision that it had no jurisdiction to implement rate affordability programs for low-income residential consumers. The Board decision was not unanimous. There was a very strong dissenting decision in this matter by Gordon Kaiser, Chair of the three-member Board panel, who found that the OEB does have the "jurisdiction to approve special rates for low-income consumers in appropriate cases." On February 25, 2008, LIEN appeared before a Divisional Court panel to appeal the OEB decision and argue that the OEB does have the authority to set affordable gas rates for low-income energy consumers.

LIEN appealed because a permanent rate assistance program is a crucial component of its strategy to address energy poverty in Ontario. At Divisional Court, LIEN's legal counsel argued that there is nothing stopping the OEB from interpreting its authority broadly. It can consider and implement rate affordability programs, or approve or fix a separate rate for low-income consumers.

LIEN will report on the Divisional Court's decision in the appeal when it is released.

- **Ontario to lift the clothesline ban**

Outdoor clotheslines are currently banned in some parts of the province under municipal bylaws and in some cases builders' covenants, usually for aesthetic reasons. On January 21, 2008, the provincial government announced that it is moving to end the bans and allow anyone living in a freehold detached, semi-detached or row house to put a clothesline out in their yard. Condominiums and high-rises would be looked at separately. The government is consulting with stakeholders in the condominium and high-rise sectors to assess how to potentially proceed in those environments.

Clothes dryers are among the most energy-consuming appliances in the home. Hanging clothes out to dry not only saves on electricity bills but also contributes to a reduction in air pollution and greenhouse gases.

The government is asking the public for input on how to best end these restrictions through a posting on Ontario's Environmental Registry at www.ebr.gov.on.ca. Comments are due by March 28, 2008.

- **OPA prepares for province-wide launch of low-income *Energy Efficiency Assistance Program for Homes***

Last December marked the end of the pilot phase of the Ontario Power Authority's low-income *Energy Efficiency Assistance Program for Houses*. On February 22, 2008, LIEN representatives attended the OPA's stakeholder session to provide input into how the program could work best. The goal of this session was to review the results of the pilot program, discuss outreach challenges, program parameters, program delivery models, and harmonization with other programs in anticipation of a future program launch. LIEN has been advocating for the expansion of the pilot program province-wide and was encouraged to learn that this year the OPA will be rolling out energy conservation and demand management program initiatives designed to help low-income Ontarians in all communities reduce their energy consumption.

- **25-in-5: Network for Poverty Reduction**

LIEN attended the “25 in 5: Network for Poverty Reduction” workshop on January 28, 2008. The network is a multi-sectoral, comprised of more than 100 provincial and Toronto-based organizations and individuals working on eliminating poverty. They call for a Poverty Reduction Plan with a goal to reduce poverty in Ontario by 25% in 5 years and 50% in 10 years. Over 250 people attended the event, aimed at working collaboratively towards solutions and targets for Ontario's poverty reduction plan. LIEN stressed that the province's poverty reduction plan and its long-term affordable housing strategy must both address energy poverty and that low-income households should not be paying more than 6% of their total household income on energy costs.

- **Toronto's Towerwise Energy Efficiency Education Action Committee**

The Toronto Atmospheric Fund has brought together a number of stakeholders, including LIEN, to form the Towerwise Energy Efficiency Education Action Committee (TEEEAC) which has met twice, on January 7 and February 25, 2008. The committee will be producing educational materials to promote energy efficiency, and greenhouse gas emission reductions, in new and existing multi-residential buildings. TEEEC is developing a work plan and a list of short, medium and long-term goals. As a start, the group is compiling a list of existing energy conservation practices that TEEEC participants are doing and/or know about which can be used as a resource. LIEN representatives have highlighted that tenants will play a vital role in the success of this initiative.

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 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

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