



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

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- **Ontario's poverty reduction strategy and help for low-income consumers**

Following the announcement of the new Ontario Cabinet on October 30th, LIEN wrote to request meetings with the new Energy Minister, Gerry Phillips, and with Children and Youth Services Minister, Deb Matthews, who is also chair of the Ontario Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction. At these meetings, LIEN plans to review the initiatives that have been launched by the Ontario government to date to assist low-income energy consumers, and discuss the urgency to make more progress – especially on the establishment of an energy rate affordability program.

Premier Dalton McGuinty has indicated that reducing poverty, with measurable targets, is a key priority for the Ontario government over the next four years of its mandate. LIEN believes this is a crucial opportunity to include energy poverty reduction in the government's comprehensive strategy.

- **LIEN's Divisional Court appeal of OEB decision scheduled for February; no progress on Ministerial Directive**

LIEN received a reply in October to our May 9th written request for a Ministerial Directive to the Ontario Energy Board to hold a generic hearing on the impact of energy prices on low-income consumers. At such a generic hearing, LIEN wants the OEB to consider and implement solutions that would include a low-income energy rate assistance program. Ministry of Energy staff indicated in the reply that it would be premature to discuss the issuing of a directive in view of LIEN's appeal of the Ontario Energy Board's decision that it does not have the jurisdiction to consider low-income rate assistance. LIEN's Divisional Court appeal has been scheduled to be heard at the end of February 2008.

- **Applications still being accepted for free energy conservation/efficiency programs for low-income homeowners/tenants**

The Ontario Power Authority's low-income **Energy Efficiency Assistance Program for Homes** was extended to December 31, 2007. Green Communities Canada (a member of LIEN) is delivering this pilot program which is free for low-income people who live in electrically-heated single, semi-detached and row houses (as tenants or owners) and pay for their own electricity. For more information, visit the GCC website at www.greencommunitiescanada.org OR call 1-888-661-0000.

The Low-Income Home Weatherization Retrofit Program for gas-heated homes that is sponsored by Enbridge Gas Distribution Inc. was piloted in the Toronto and Peel Regions for a period ending December 31, 2007 and is being delivered by Green\$aver. The program, which provides a free home energy assessment and weatherization upgrades at no cost to improve the energy efficiency of homes, will be offered again in 2008 to over 300 Enbridge Gas qualifying low-income customers. For more information about the service area for the 2008 phase of the program and for applications, visit the Green\$aver website at http://www.greensaver.org/audit_eeaph.html or call Agatha at 416-203-3106 ext. 230. Alternatively, you can also contact Pam Callow at Enbridge at 416-753-6286.

- **Reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Toronto's high rise residential buildings: energy efficiency retrofits and low-income tenants**

The Toronto Atmospheric Fund hosted the Dan Leckie Forum on Energy Efficiency Retrofits in Residential High Rise Buildings on November 28, 2007. The event, which was co-sponsored by the Greater Toronto Apartment Association, brought together representatives from many sectors to develop strategic advice on accelerating greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction activity in high rise buildings in Toronto. LIEN did a presentation on the impacts on low-income tenants, particularly financial, of energy conservation and efficiency work that may be undertaken. In addition, LIEN highlighted the need – if Smart sub-metering is introduced in multi-residential buildings – for landlords' energy conservation obligations to be those most effective in reducing energy consumption/costs for tenants, and in helping Toronto achieve its GHG emission reduction goals. A Forum Statement will be issued in the near future.

- **OEB consumer awareness sessions on energy retail contracts kick off in Sault Ste. Marie**

LIEN arranged for the OEB's Chief Compliance Officer, Brian Hewson, to present an information session at the northern region community legal clinics' training in Sault Ste. Marie on October 18, 2007. The session focused on consumer rights, responsibilities and choices with regards to electricity retailers and natural gas marketers who sell energy contracts – with special emphasis on seniors and low-income consumers. LIEN also distributed evaluation forms to the attendees. LIEN has shared the feedback with the OEB to enable them to tailor future sessions according to their target audience.

LIEN is working with the OEB to identify organizations across Ontario that may benefit from the information sessions. This is because LIEN has received a number of reports from the community legal clinic system and other organizations regarding low-income people who ill-advisedly signed energy contracts that they cannot afford and that involve significant financial penalties to cancel.

If your organization is interested in participating in an OEB consumer awareness session, please contact LIEN.

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 Zee Bhanji 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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