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PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

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**EO Low-Income Collaborative Minutes
Process and Assistance Sub-Workgroups
February 12, 2010
1:30-3:00**

Meeting called to order 1:35

- **E-Forum:** Art Thayer (MECA) brought up the need for a professional forum to allow members to get quick responses to questions and exchange information between monthly meetings.
 - Connie Costner (MSU Extension) suggested a group be started at www.linkedin.com/

Assistance Issues

- **Third Party Utility Bills:** Sandra Philpott-Burke (MPSC) told of a customer complaint of a customer living in an apartment building in Detroit who had paid the landlord rent, this amount covering both rent and utilities. The landlord had not forwarded the utility payment, with the result that the tenant received a shutoff notice from the utility. The tenant was not eligible for payment assistance because she did not have a utility bill, but a third party statement (LIHEAP rules).
 - The group discussed options related to Sale for Resale, installing individual meters and a split between residential and commercial spaces within a building. (Businesses objecting to adding individual meters as these meters take up common space which could otherwise be rented out.)
 - A complicating factor is an MPSC ruling that the sale of heat is not the same as the sale of energy, thus not covered by billing rules.
 - Safety and access/maintenance issues must be considered.
 - Currently, these complaints are settled on a case-by-case basis.
- **EO Surcharge Gap:** Attention was turned to consideration of the gap between the EO surcharge cap and actual utility program spending levels. (PA 295 of 2008 mandated 0.75% of total retail sales revenue for 2007, 1% of total retail sales revenues for 2008)
 - Staff to check the legality of using these funds to address complaints of the above nature.
- **Utility Low-Income Relief Measures:** Discussion centered on relief measures that could be implemented on a timely basis, i.e. those not requiring legislative action or rule changes.

DELEG is an equal opportunity employer/program.

Auxiliary aids, services and other reasonable accommodations are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

- Sandra Philpott-Burke mentioned that utilities could always go beyond the Billing Rules without a change to those rules. Doing more is not a problem, doing less is.
- David Tyler (MGU) volunteered that they are already actively offering breaks to low-income customers such as offering 1 x the average billing month balance during space heating season, vs. 2 x the average billing month balance outside this time. And if an outside agency is paying a customer's bill, fees and penalties are waived.
- Other utilities were in agreement that aid is being offered to low-income customers. Staff requested a brief summary from represented utilities of their efforts.
- Concerns with reaching the "new poor", those people having recently lost their jobs and not familiar with traditional avenues of assistance such as DHS. Advertising needs to happen in non-traditional channels – use social media (Facebook, texting, etc)
 - Unemployment Insurance Office: utilities have given information to them for distribution.
 - Sandra needs 1-2 line message suggestions to pass along to the Director of Michigan Unemployment website and (MARVIN) telephone hold messages advertising utility bill assistance/People Care type programs. Also possible use by Meijer, Kroger, Catholic Conference (Steve Matthews), other access points. Contact Carol White of the Michigan Association of Broadcasters, Michigan Press Association for banner ads?
 - Does a Detroit Edison Public Service Announcement message exist? Sandra thought she'd heard one...
 - The need for additional information/classes on budgeting skills was brought up.
 - Mention was made that 2-1-1 is not yet in all of Michigan's 83 Counties
- Debbie Harmon (Consumers Energy) discussed their *Gatekeepers Program: Gatekeeper Program Celebrates 20th Anniversary (Summer 2008)* While many things have changed since 1987, there's one constant in a service jointly provided by the Michigan Commission on Services to the Aging and Consumers Energy. Now in its 20th year, that service is called the Gatekeeper Program, and it involves providing assistance to older Michigan residents who need help, but may be unable to get it themselves. Consumers Energy joined the Gatekeeper Program to provide extra "eyes and ears" through the utility company's employees who have direct contact with natural gas and electric customers. Over the past 20

years, Consumers Energy employees have referred nearly 5,000 older adults to the Gatekeeper Program, allowing them to receive assistance with essential, often life-sustaining services. The Michigan Office of Services to the Aging is the state resource for information on aging in Michigan. For more information, visit www.michigan.gov/miseniors

Process Issues:

- Art: Are weatherization programs for Non-EO Program Customers, (propane, wood heating) out there using State & Federal funding? Are energy audits required?
 - Jim Crisp (MCAAA) CAP uses income for eligibility. Extra ARRA funds of \$240 M do not take heating source into consideration, so non-utility customers are eligible and the same process/procedures are followed. Funds are leveraged to provide qualifying measures, filling in the funding gaps whenever possible. CAPs also refer clients to other sources of help for food, heating assistance, etc whenever possible.
- Art: ARRA funds are temporary – what will happen when they disappear?
 - Jim: It's true that ARRA funds have been an infusion of money, but DOE funds for weatherization will not go away. CAPs have weatherized 6-7,000 homes without ARRA funds, looking at completing 33,000 homes over two years with the additional ARRA funds.

ACTION ITEMS:

- **Detroit Edison:** Do they have a Public Service Announcement message? (Dave Henderson to check with DTE Marketing Dept.)
- **Utility Staff:** MPSC Staff requested a brief summary of current billing aid efforts being offered to low-income customers.
- **ALL:** one-two sentences for Michigan Unemployment website and telephone hold messages (MARVIN) advertising utility bill assistance/PeopleCare type programs. Check possibility of advertising message on MSHDA Housing Locator site (<http://michiganhousinglocator.com/>) Also possible use by Meijer, Kroger, other suggested access points? Thoughts on contacting Carol White of the Michigan Association of Broadcasters, Michigan Press Association for banner ads?
- **ALL:** information to fit on cardstock for extension offices/churches/kiosks (Caseworkers, THAW) advertising utility bill assistance.
- **Bob Nelson** volunteered to draw on his considerable expertise as a past MPSC Commissioner and let Lori know what steps needed to be taken in order to administratively address the sale of heat vs. the sale of energy with the Commission.
- **Staff** to create a LinkedIn group and send invitations to members interested in joining. (*MPSC Collaborative Low-Income Workgroup has been formed.*)
- **Staff** to check the legality of using EO Surcharge “gap” funds to address complaints such as the one brought by Sandra Philpott-Burke.

Meeting adjourned at 3:00

Next meeting of the main workgroup: **March 12, 2010 at 1:30 in Hearing Room A**