Addressing Low Income Energy Issues in Ontario: Next Steps

A proposal from the Toronto Environmental Alliance, Canadian Environmental Law Association, Income Security Advocacy Centre and Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario

Background

On March 12, 2004 Energy Minister Duncan met with the Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA) to discuss CELA's recommendations to the Ontario Energy Board to require local distribution companies (LDCs) to have DSM programs specifically for low income households in their DSM portfolios. While the Minister recognized the importance of such programs, his most pressing concern at the time was to provide immediate assistance to low income consumers in Ontario in the face of the April 1st, electricity price rise. The Minister asked CELA to provide recommendations to both himself and Minister Pupatello on immediate actions the government could take to assist low income consumers and to do so by April 15th, 2004. CELA asked the Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) to work with it and to take a leadership role in the preparation of the report and its recommendations. The Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC) and Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO) both provided extensive comments on the report. The report was submitted to the Ministers on April 8th 2004.

In the TEA report, TEA recommended that[1]:

- A comprehensive set of DSM programs for low income households be developed that include building envelope, appliances, and heating and cooling systems
- A set of low income DSM programs be developed in a ready to implement format for LDCs in time for the 2004-2005 heating season
- A set of low income DSM programs be developed in a ready to implement format for LDCs in time for the 2005-2006 heating season.

The project proponents, ACTO, ISAC, CELA and TEA, are founding members of the Local Income Energy Network (LIEN), an informal group of over 30 non-governmental organizations interested in low income energy issues representing a cross-section of environmental energy, tenant and low income advocacy groups. This group was formed to address the April electricity price rise and its implications for low income families and to suggest solutions. Because of the timing of Minister Duncan's request, it was not possible to mobilize all the potential resources of LIEN in preparing the recommendations. Capacity-building of LIEN is needed in order for it to be a more responsive and effective unified voice on low income households and energy issues.

Because of this need for capacity building of LIEN and to mobilize LIEN to help to ensure that the recommendations of the TEA report are implemented, the four project proponents submitted an application to the Toronto Atmospheric Fund on April 22, 2004 for a portion of the funds needed to respond effectively to those priorities.

Our Project

Building on the initial work of LIEN to raise public awareness regarding low income energy issues and to suggest possible solutions, the project proponents, want to develop a more comprehensive and detailed energy strategy on low income energy assistance and conservation. In particular, over the next six months, we want to mobilize LIEN to develop a set of ready to implement low income DSM programs that Toronto Hydro as well as other LDCs can implement in time for the 2004-2005 heating season. As a result, the work will focus on identifying existing energy conservation and efficiency programs being delivered by community

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[1] Other recommendations for low income households included an energy rebate, the removal of the security deposit requirement payment their LDC, and a no cut-off policy.

and environmental groups in Toronto and across Ontario to explore opportunities for LDCs to piggyback onto existing programs. As well, we will identify potential low income community groups, advocacy groups and environmental groups who may be able to serve as delivery agents for programs. The next phase of our work (outside the scope of this project) would be develop ready to implement low income DSM programs that can be implemented by Toronto Hydro as well as other LDCs for the 2005-2006 heating season.

We will build LIEN capacity to mobilize it to develop ready to implement DSM programs for LDCs for the 2004-2005 heating season by:

1. Outreach and capacity-building for LIEN to broaden its membership and improve its networking ability.
2. Sponsoring research on the design of, and delivery options for, a comprehensive set of low income energy programs.
3. Organizing and hosting a LIEN conference to raise awareness of, and refine recommendations regarding, program design and delivery for the low income energy programs for the fall of 2004.
4. Preparing and submitting a report, endorsed by as many LIEN members as possible, to the Ministers of Energy and Community and Social Services and local electric utilities on a set of ready to implement DSM programs for the fall of 2004.

The four project proponents are asking for $15,000 from the Ministry of Energy and $15,000 from the Ministry of Community and Social Services (approximately 30% of the total budget) to support the first phase of LIEN's work over the May – October 2004 period.

Budget and Timeline

Budget Item	Amount	Timeline
Outreach and Networking • Staff time for LIEN secretariat (1 FTE for 6 months) • Release time for steering committee to attend meetings, oversee secretariat and consultant, and review research • Materials and support costs	 $15,000 $14,000 $5,000	 May 2004 – October 2004
Research (IndEco Strategic Consulting Inc.) • Draft report (to be circulated for comment) • Release time for steering committee to conduct interviews • Final Report (revised based on feedback)	$30,000 $1,200	 Aug. 15, 2004 Sept. 30 2004
Workshop • Prepare agenda, format, review materials and prepare conference report. Release time for steering committee • Logistics • Facilitation, preparation of materials for feedback (IndEco)	 $2,800 $17,000 $6,000	Early September
Administration	$9,000	
TOTAL	$100,000	
Amount requested from Ministry of Energy	**$15,000**	
Request from Ministry of Community and Social Services	**$15,000**	