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Comments Regarding Bill #1101

AN ACT CONCERNING COORDINATION OF LOW-INCOME ENERGY PROGRAMS

Before the Energy and Technology Committee

March 10, 2009

Prepared by Shirley Bergert¹

Recommended Action: SUPPORT

Electric and gas bills are increasingly unaffordable to low-income households. A December 2008 study, the average annual shortfall between actual and affordable home energy bills for Connecticut households at or below 185% of the federal poverty level is over \$2,200 per household.² The state addresses this problem through a range of programs which are not effectively coordinated. Coordination is likely to make the various programs more effective in addressing critical need.

This bill directs the Department of Public Utility Control (DPUC) to conduct a proceeding and develop low income gas and electric service rates for service provided by public service electric distribution and gas companies, which, to the extent practicable, coordinates available assistance to allow low income households to afford necessary utility service. **With significant federal energy and conservation stimulus funding expected to expand available programs for low income households in the state, a DPUC proceeding to coordinate resources is very timely.**

The assistance to be coordinated under the bill includes:

- Potential discounts through the electricity purchasing pool operated by the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) which is supposed to offer the discounts to low income households pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. § 16a-14e, but currently does not do so;
- Energy assistance;
- Conservation assistance funded or administered by the Department of Social Services, OPM or the public service electric distribution or gas companies;
- Renewable energy assistance programs;
- Matching payment programs offered by the public service electric distribution and gas companies.

¹ Shirley Bergert serves: as the residential representative on the Energy Conservation Management Board overseeing the expenditure of ratepayer conservation funds in Connecticut Energy Efficiency Fund (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 16-245m); as the low income representative on the Fuel Oil Conservation Board (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 16a-22f); on the Low Income Energy Advisory Board (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 16a-41b); and on the Advisory Board of the Institute for Sustainable Energy at Eastern Connecticut State University.

² This report was prepared by Roger Colton, Fisher, Sheehan and Colton, for Operation Fuel. The report can be accessed at <http://www.operationfuel.org/>, click on "Operation Fuel Releases 'Home Energy Affordability Gap: Connecticut (2006)'" Report (bottom left of page), and the 2008 report files are linked under "'Home Energy Affordability Gap: Connecticut (2008)'" Report."

