

Good Afternoon members of the Appropriations, Energy and Technology, and Human Services Committees. My name is Joanne Balaschak and I am the energy services director at New Opportunities, Inc. in Waterbury , as well as, the statewide energy person for the Connecticut Association for Community Action. I will attempt to lay the foundation of why it is important for those qualifying for energy assistance to be afforded a discounted utility rate.

The first paragraph illustrates the current problem for those who do not heat with a utility:

Last year there were 131,541 eligible applicants receiving benefits from the federally-funded low income energy program. This program has been designed for a number of years to provide assistance for primary heat only . Of course, not all 131,541 recipients heat with a utility; therein lies the problem. To be eligible for the utilities' matching payment program and low budget worksheet you **MUST** heat with either electricity or gas and qualify for the energy program. The problem we present to you today is that all eligible applicants are still in dire need of help with their secondary utility service, but the arrearage programs and help available is very limited for this population. This means that a very large percentage of these households will lose their electric and/or gas service at the end of the moratorium on May first. Without year-round electric or gas service, the elderly, families with children, and families with members that have serious medical issues are at the highest risk. Without service they have no refrigeration, no ability to cook, no lighting, and no means of keeping cool when temperatures are at their highest. Not being able to afford the exorbitant costs of service can ultimately lead to costly medical issues that we all pay for in the end. I have seen this over and over again, with your constituents trying to balance a budget that leads to harmful wrong choices. With the highest utility rates only second to Hawaii, it is time to reduce the burden on our most vulnerable population. With unemployment statistics at record high rates, it is a problem that many have never experienced in prior years. We have been seeing an unprecedented number of applicants who have never applied for assistance in the past . Not being able to pay the high cost of utility service is becoming a state-wide epidemic. Let's make utility service affordable to all.

The second paragraph explains the problems with the current low budget structure for those that heat with a utility:

Last year we served 67,399 families statewide on energy assistance whose primary heat is a utility. It is fortunate that each utility company does provide a matching payment program, as well as, a low budget worksheet that enables agencies to reduce the customer's monthly payments down to an affordable amount. **This program proved to be 80% successful , showing that people do, in fact, want to pay, but they can only pay what is affordable.** By being successful this means that the program allows participants to maintain year-round service. Unfortunately, of the 67,399 eligible families no more than 6,000 of the total have completed a low budget worksheet. Each year the CAAs attempt to complete the low budget sheets, but unnecessary duplicative efforts complicate the process. A CAA might complete a worksheet, but the utilities are behind in processing them so the client is sent a letter stating what the utilities want the customer to pay instead of what our low budget sheet indicates. Not only does that bring undue stress to the customer, but each agency is then flooded with frantic phone calls in the middle of the energy season trying to explain. Another impediment to the process is that many eligible customers fall through the cracks never aware that this program exists and end up paying the high monthly bill that they cannot afford. Some pay what they can and are many times shut off anyway at the end of the moratorium if their bill shows an arrearage.

I hope I have clarified, in my feeble attempt, to explain how valuable the existing programs are, but how difficult to access in their current form. In order to achieve equitable access, a discounted rate across the board would certainly be more manageable, but **MUST** be affordable.

Income/Expense Budget Calculation

A Applicant Name: _____
 Address: _____ Street: _____ Town: _____

Utility Account Number: _____ Telephone Number: _____
 Est. Energy Asst. Award: _____

Primary Heat: _____
 Agency/worker signature: _____
 *Use Energy Assistance to reduce utility for heat.

B Monthly Disposable Income/Resources

Gross Monthly Household Income (based on income documentation) _____

Monthly State/Federal Withholdings (Income from employment and/or Unemp. Comp.) _____

Total Adjusted Gross Monthly Income _____

Total Liquid Assets divided by 12 (from Liquid Assets Declaration/Verification Form) _____

Total Available Income/Resources _____

Number in Household _____

C Monthly Nonadjustable Expenses

Rent or Mortgage (Circle one) _____

Monthly Home or Renters Insurance _____

Monthly Property Taxes (if not escrowed with mortgage) _____

Medical _____

Medical (Out of pocket expenses) _____

Alimony/Child Support (Amount that is actually being paid) _____

Day Care (Actual amount being paid) (For employment and training ONLY) _____

Total Nonadjustable Expenses = _____

E Monthly Adjustable Expenses

Gas (MPP Budget calculation or monthly average) _____

Electric (MPP Budget calculation or monthly average) _____

Deliverable Fuel (oil, propane) _____

Telephone (\$30 basic rate per DPUC) _____

Cable (\$40 basic rate per DPUC) _____

Water (\$40 basic rate per DPUC) _____

Food
 A. Standard Allowance (see table below) _____

B. Food Stamps (if received) _____

Adjusted Food Expense = _____

Transportation (\$90 if no car, \$400 with car) _____

Clothing & personal expenses (\$25 X number in household) _____

Total Adjustable Expenses _____

Total Nonadjustable Expenses _____

Total Monthly Expenses _____

Total Income _____

Income vs. Expenses _____

Standard Food Allowance Table

Please circle household size

Hsld. Size	Allowance
1	\$233
2	\$353
3	\$527
4	\$726
5	\$926

D MPP Budget calculation

Estimated annual usage (\$) _____

Less estimated energy assistance _____

Balance of annual bills = _____

Monthly payment towards current bills (Balance of annual bill divided by twelve) _____

Payment towards back balance _____

Total monthly payment = _____

F AMOUNT YOU MUST PAY TO YOUR UTILITY EACH MONTH (Utility Co.) _____

(Minimum Payment of \$50 required)

I affirm that all the information provided on this form is true to the best of my knowledge. I have authorized the social services agency which completed this form for me to obtain my billing information from my utility and to provide that utility company with this completed form. I agree to the completion of an energy audit of my dwelling unit and the installation of appropriate weatherization measures if determined necessary in order to make my dwelling unit more energy efficient. I understand that information regarding my situation may be provided to another agency for purposes of providing additional services or benefits.

Applicant Signature: _____
 Date: _____