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John B. Howard, Chair

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REVISED

PSC Announces Expansion of Low-Income Energy Affordability Program

\$129 Million in Additional Benefits for Low-Income Energy Affordability Programs to Deliver Relief to Over 1 Million Low-Income Households in New York

Action Provides Utilities with Time to Implement Improvements Before Heating Season

ALBANY — The New York State Public Service Commission (Commission) today made substantial improvements to the low-income energy bill discount programs administered by the major electric and gas utilities, including expanding the reach of the program to an additional 95,000 customers.

“We must address the fact that millions of New Yorkers struggle every month to pay their electric and natural gas bills,” **said Commission Chair John B. Howard.** “Through a wide range of initiatives, we can achieve lower energy bills for all customers, at all income levels. But direct assistance is needed for these low-income households where energy costs can account for too much of a family’s monthly income.”

With its decision today, the Commission made significant improvements to the low-income energy bill discount programs administered by the major electric and gas utilities, most notably by dramatically expanding the amount of money being made available. Previously, the annual budget for the statewide Energy Affordability Policy (EAP) program was \$237.6 million.

Today’s decision increases the EAP annual budget by \$129 million to \$366.7 million. The increase means that about 95,000 more low-income customers will be able to receive benefits, a 10 percent increase from a year ago. Bill discounts vary, depending on the utility.

Specifically, the Commission increased the low-income bill discounts, and directed the utilities to develop a standard self-identification process to make the bill discount programs available to low-income customers to address gaps in data sharing and file matching between utilities and the state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA). The EAP program’s expansion better aligns bill discount formulas with income criteria and Home Energy Assistance Program benefits that will result in more targeted bill discounts, and encouraged the utilities to target participation in energy efficiency programs to low-income customers with the highest energy usage.

The increase in funds was strongly supported by a number of organizations and community groups, including the American Association of Retired Persons, Citizens for Local Power, City of New York, Energy Efficiency for All New York, the Joint Utilities, Public Utility Law Project of New York, Inc., and the Utility Intervention Unit of the New York State Department Division of Consumer Protection.

On May 20, 2016, the Commission issued an order adopting an EAP which set a target energy burden at or below 6 percent of household income for all low-income households in New York State. To advance this goal, low-income bill discount programs were established for each of the major electric and gas utilities. Key directives set out by the EAP include the standardization of utility energy affordability programs statewide to reflect best practices where appropriate, streamlining of rate cases, and greater consistency between the programs and the Commission's statutory and policy objectives.

To reach the target of no more than a 6 percent energy burden for low-income New Yorkers, it would be necessary to coordinate and leverage all available resources at the State's disposal, including multiple sources of financial assistance to lower customers' bills, energy efficiency measures to reduce usage, and access to clean energy sources to lower the cost of the energy itself. As part of the Commission's decision, Commission staff will work closely with other entities, including OTDA and the utilities, to ensure that low-income customers receive the assistance they need.

Today's decision may be obtained by going to the Commission Documents section of the Commission's Web site at www.dps.ny.gov and entering Case Numbers 14-M-0565 or 20-M-0266 in the input box labeled "Search for Case/Matter Number". Many libraries offer free Internet access. Commission documents may also be obtained from the Commission's Files Office, 14th floor, Three Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12223 (518-474-2500). If you have difficulty understanding English, please call us at 1-800-342-3377 for free language assistance services regarding this press release.