

STATE OF MICHIGAN
BEFORE THE MICHIGAN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

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In the matter, on the Commission's own motion,)	
regarding establishment of a Low-income Energy)	Case No. U-15918
Resources Task Force.)	
_____)	

At the March 18, 2009 meeting of the Michigan Public Service Commission in Lansing,
Michigan.

PRESENT: Hon. Orjiakor N. Isiogu, Chairman
Hon. Monica Martinez, Commissioner
Hon. Steven A. Transeth, Commissioner

ORDER

On October 6, 2008, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm signed into law Public Acts 286 and 295 of 2008. Among other things, these acts impose several responsibilities on the Commission and energy suppliers that are directly related to programs beneficial to low-income utility customers in this state. For example, Section 11(3) of Act 286, MCL 460.11(3), indicates that “[n]otwithstanding any other provision of this act, the commission may establish eligible low-income customer or eligible senior citizen customer rates.” The same section of Act 286 obligates all rate regulated utilities “[u]pon filing of a rate increase request, ...[to]... include proposed eligible low-income customer and eligible senior citizen customer rates and a method to allocate the revenue shortfall attributed to the implementation of those rates upon all customer classes.” Likewise, in Section 71(3)(a) of Act 295, MCL 460.1071(3)(a), the Legislature directed that all

energy optimization plans “[p]ropose a set of energy optimization programs that include offerings for each customer class, including low income residential.”

These legislative directives come at a time when the nation’s and Michigan’s economies are in the throes of an economic and financial malaise the likes of which have not been experienced for many decades. The Commission also recognizes that there are a variety of factors contributing to significant upward pressure on electric and natural gas utility rates that make energy affordability a key issue for many Michigan households and businesses. Utilities are facing the prospect of more customers being unable to pay their energy bills. Customers who are unemployed, have lower incomes, or have fixed incomes are disproportionately affected by rising energy costs as they must devote an increasingly larger share of their income to paying for natural gas and electricity. As indicated by the United States Department of Energy’s Technical Assistance Center, low-income households spend nearly 17% of their total annual income on energy, whereas more affluent households spend only 4% of their annual income, on average, on their energy needs. Based on these and other considerations, the Commission concludes that the time has come for the Commission to establish a Low-income Energy Resources Task Force (Task Force) for the purpose of examining the issues surrounding energy affordability for Michigan’s utility customers.

It shall be the goal of the Task Force to ensure that Michigan is doing all that it can to efficiently use federal, state, and private funds available for low-income and senior citizen customer assistance programs. Those who volunteer to assist with the Task Force’s efforts will develop recommendations for low-income utility rates aimed at Michigan households and examine policies for the optimization of low-income customers’ energy usage.

The Commission envisions that the Task Force will study and develop both short-term and long-term policies and program recommendations regarding all of the following items:

- Making energy bills more manageable by offering flexible payment options or determining customer specific affordable payment amounts.
- Reducing customer costs by lowering or eliminating charges associated with making a payment, reconnecting service, and assessing interest on late payments.
- Removing barriers to obtaining or retaining service by modifying deposit policies, allowing former customers to pay prior bills in installments, and offering arrearage forgiveness plans.
- Determining the amount and effect of an affordable low-income utility rate.
- Evaluating Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding, as required by MCL 460.10s, which requires the Commission to monitor the extent to which federal funds are available for low-income and energy efficiency assistance programs.
- Examining eligibility restrictions for low-income assistance programs that may prevent aid to those most in need.
- Identifying ways to coordinate the activities of government assistance programs, non-government assistance programs, and service providers to more effectively allow payment of low-income customers' utility bills.

The Commission's Executive Secretary and Media Specialist are directed to publicize that the Commission is seeking assistance from Michigan governmental bodies, energy providers, consumer groups, and other interested persons to participate in the work of the Task Force. The initial meeting of the Task Force will be at 10:30 a.m. March 20, 2009 at the Commission's Lansing offices, 6545 Mercantile Way, Lansing, Michigan. All interested persons are invited to attend this meeting. Prospective participants may contact the Commission's Executive Secretary at (517) 241-6160 for additional information.

All written correspondence shall reference Case No. U-15918 and will become public information available on the Commission's website. Comments may be addressed to Mary Jo Kunkle, Executive Secretary, Michigan Public Service Commission, 6545 Mercantile Way, Suite 7, Lansing, MI 48909. E-mails may be addressed to mpscedockets@michigan.gov.

Finally, the Commission intends to appoint a member of the Commission Staff to be selected at a later time to serve as chairperson of the Low-income Energy Resources Task Force.

THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED that:

- A. The Low-income Energy Resources Task Force is created as described in this order.
- B. A member of the Commission Staff to be selected at a later time shall be appointed to serve as chairperson of the Low-income Energy Resources Task Force.
- C. The Commission's Executive Secretary and Media Specialist are directed to publicize that the Commission is seeking participation from Michigan governmental bodies, energy providers, consumer groups, and other interested persons on the Task Force. The initial meeting of the Task Force will be held at 10:30 a.m. on March 20, 2009 at the Commission's Lansing offices, 6545 Mercantile Way, Lansing, Michigan. All interested persons are invited to attend this meeting. Prospective participants may contact the Commission's Executive Secretary at (517) 241-6160 for additional information.

The Commission reserves jurisdiction and may issue further orders as necessary.

MICHIGAN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

Orjiakor N. Isiogu, Chairman

By its action of March 18, 2009.

Monica Martinez, Commissioner

Mary Jo Kunkle, Executive Secretary

Steven A. Transeth, Commissioner

P R O O F O F S E R V I C E

STATE OF MICHIGAN)

Case No. U-15918

County of Ingham)

Lisa Felice being duly sworn, deposes and says that on March 18, 2009 A.D. she served a copy of the attached **Commission Order (Commission's Own Motion) via e-mail transmission**, to the persons as shown on the attached service list (Listserv Distribution List).

Lisa Felice

Subscribed and sworn to before me
this 18th day of March 2009

Sharron A. Allen
Notary Public, Ingham County, MI
My Commission Expires August 16, 2011

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