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STATE OF VERMONT
PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

Case No. 20-0203-PET
Investigation into the establishment of reduced rates
for low-income residential ratepayers of Vermont
electric utilities.

**Vermont Electric Cooperative Response to February 3, 2023 Procedural Order Requesting
Information Regarding Bill Assistance Programs for Income-Qualified Members**

Vermont Electric Cooperative (VEC) continues to be committed to exploring every opportunity to minimize cost pressures for all members, and particularly for those members with the greatest energy burdens. We prioritize keeping costs down, not only for the most energy burdened, but for those with medium energy burdens, and others. The Affordable Community Renewable Energy (“ACRE”) Program grant funding provides an excellent opportunity. In response to the February 3 Procedural Order, we offer the following information:

Cooperative Renewable Energy Invitation (CREI) Program Summary:

Although the grant agreement has not been finalized, we can address what we anticipate to be the final program. Vermont Electric Cooperative (VEC) and Washington Electric Cooperative (WEC), with \$2,693,667 grant from Vermont Department of Public Service (DPS), will offer income-qualified residential Co-op members the opportunity to participate in an affordable and clean energy future. Program participants will be invited to sponsor a share in a community solar project and will receive meaningful fixed monthly bill credits for a fixed period of time. 98% of the grant award, or \$2,652,007, will be passed directly to Co-op members in bill credits.

- The amount of bill assistance each participating low-income customer will likely receive

Program participants will sponsor a share in a community solar project and will receive a \$45 fixed monthly bill credit for 5 years. \$540 annually, and \$2,700 over the sponsorship term, will provide meaningful reductions in member electric bills.

-How many low-income customers each utility aims to enroll in its ACRE Program.

We expect to enroll 896 Co-op members (682 VEC and 214 WEC). Phase 1 of the project (Jericho landfill Solar site) is already operational and will allow for approximately 498 sponsors (379 VEC and 119 WEC). A phase 2 project has not yet been identified but when developed is expected to account for the additional 398 sponsorships (303 VEC and 95 WEC).



Jericho Landfill Solar Project- Photo courtesy of Encore Renewables

-The length of time each utility anticipates they will be able to provide this bill assistance before the funds run out

The program will last 5 years from enrollment, with 60 monthly bill credits per participant.

- How each utility plans to make low-income customers aware of its ACRE Program and then enroll eligible customers.

In anticipation of the grant award, we have already begun to develop member lists to enroll as part of an initial “soft launch”. Both Co-ops have direct and ongoing relationships with their Co-op members. We have frequent communications with members who struggle to pay their electric bill. When the Cooperative Renewable Energy Invitation program is open for enrollment, we will inform members who may qualify about this new opportunity. Some or all the following outreach tools will be used to connect with members who may benefit from the program, depending on the pace of enrollment:

- On-bill messages and bill inserts.
- Quarterly direct mail newsletters.
- Direct communication from Member Service team when working with members through payment arrangements.
- Inserts to be included with disconnect notices.
- Direct email messages.
- Announcement on Websites, Social Media, and Front Porch Forum.
- Tables at Co-op Annual Meeting, and other events where members may be present.

Additionally, we will be working very closely with our Community Action Agency partners on outreach opportunities. These partners include Capstone (WEC and VEC), NEKCA (VEC), and CVOEO (VEC). We will also be working closely with GreenSavingsSmart to integrate this opportunity into their coaching and assistance programs.

If possible, we will work to get information directly out to LIHEIP participant lists or other lists for programs that have income eligibility requirements.

Other opportunities for outreach and enrollment may include sign-up events at local municipalities, local schools and libraries, especially in communities that have traditionally been left out of the renewable energy transition such as BIPOC and New Americans. To reach these communities we will also seek ideas from those with more expertise about how to best address this challenge.

The Commission is also interested in learning what, if anything, utilities are planning to do to take advantage of provisions in the federal Inflation Reduction Act that may be used to benefit low-income customers.

VEC continues to explore every opportunity to minimize cost pressures for all members, and particularly for those members with the greatest energy burdens. We have been monitoring the IRA opportunities and will be applying for projects, mostly in collaboration with national and Vermont partners. We do not see any opportunity at this time to submit proposals for direct bill assistance. The resiliency and energy transformation projects we are applying for will benefit all cooperative members, especially those with the least ability to withstand bill increases.

Supporting our members that have high energy burdens will continue to be a priority for VEC. We agree that energy equity is an important step in making the climate transition just and equitable.

We will continue to work on behalf of all our members in the hope of ensuring a successful path forward.

Dated at Montpelier, Vermont, this 2nd day of March 2023.

Respectfully submitted,

VERMONT ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.



By: Andrea Cohen, Manager
Government Affairs and Member Relations