



Low-Income Energy Network

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Media release

Growing number of households caught in Ontario energy crisis: LIEN releases low-income energy efficiency program *Queen's Park Media Studio, Thursday January 20, 10:30 a.m.*

TORONTO- As electricity rates increase, a growing number of the hundreds of thousands of low-income households in Ontario are at risk of losing their homes this winter. The Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN) has designed an energy conservation program to protect low-income consumers from unaffordable energy bills this heating season. Low-income households are almost twice as likely as average-income households to heat with electricity. A drafty home with electric heat can use 2,000 kWh/month in the winter. In Toronto, this costs \$177.78 a month. That is one-third of the maximum amount a single mother with two children receives from Ontario Works for all housing costs, including utilities.

“Electricity and heat are basic necessities and universal access is critical,” says **Mary Todorow** of the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario. “For many low-waged workers, seniors and others on income security programs, higher energy prices will mean a choice between heating, eating or paying the rent.”

“These programs could permanently reduce low-income consumer energy bills by between one-third and one-half, while helping fight smog and climate change. Energy conservation is key to the proposed phase-out of coal plants in Ontario,” says **Keith Stewart** from the Toronto Environmental Alliance.

Last year, the Ontario government encouraged Local Distribution Companies (LDCs) to invest in energy conservation initiatives. LIEN’s program, which was developed with financial support from the Ontario Ministry of Energy and the Toronto Atmospheric Fund (TAF), would ensure that these initiatives reach low-income consumers. In response to LIEN’s report, the Ontario Energy Board recommended last month that local utilities investigate initiatives to assist low-income consumers as they develop these programs.

LIEN’s program provides relief directly to low-income homeowners and tenants who pay directly for their electricity. The LIEN plan includes weatherization and heating and appliance upgrades, when these are owned by the tenants. Tenants account for about 30% of Ontario households and comprise 62% of households in core housing need – a disproportionately large share. There are about 565,000 tenant households in core need in Ontario. Those households have already faced years of rent increases, often higher than the rate of inflation. The recent increases in energy costs risks driving a growing number of renter households out of their homes.

“Ontario is lagging 30 years behind other countries, like the U.S., in delivering energy efficiency and conservation programs that significantly reduce systemic energy poverty,” says **Edward de Gale** from Share the Warmth. “Our experience shows that high energy costs are the second biggest reason for economic evictions in Ontario, right after unaffordable rents.”

LIEN was formed in early 2004 to raise awareness of the impact of rising energy costs on low-income households and to recommend solutions.

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