

Adoptation
Alliance of Community Assistance
Ministries of Greater Houston (ACAM)
Alliance Adolescent & Children's
Services
Arrow Child and Family Ministries
Bering Omega Community Services
Care for Elders
Career and Recovery Resources, Inc.
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of
Galveston-Houston
ChildBuilders
CHILDREN AT RISK
Children's Defense Fund
Coalition for Behavioral Health Services
Coalition for the Homeless of
Houston/Harris Co., Inc.
Collaborative for Children
Communities In Schools
Community Family Centers
Covenant House of Texas
DePelchin Children's Center
Family Services of Greater Houston
Fort Bend Regional Council on
Substance Abuse, Inc.
Gateway to Care
Good Neighbor Healthcare Center
Gulf Coast CHIP Coalition
Harris County Child Abuse Task Force
Harris County Healthcare Alliance
Healthcare for the Homeless-Houston
Houston Area Association for the
Education of Young Children
Houston Area Women's Center
Houston Food Bank
Houston Area Immunization Registry
IntraCare Hospitals
Jewish Family Service
Jewish Federation of Greater Houston
Justice for Children
League of Women Voters Houston
Legacy Community Health
Services, Inc.
Memorial Hermann Healthcare System
Mental Health America
of Greater Houston
NAMI Metropolitan Houston
NAMI West Houston, Inc.
Neighborhood Centers, Inc.
Neuhaus Education Center
Northwest Assistance Ministries
Planned Parenthood of Houston
and Southeast Texas, Inc.
Prepared 4 Life
San Jose Clinic
SEARCH
South County Community Clinic,
DBA The Community Clinic
Spaulding for Children
St. Luke's Episcopal Health System
Systems of Hope
Texans Together Education Fund
Texas Children's Hospital
The Arc of Greater Houston
The Methodist Hospital System
The Network of Behavioral
Health Providers
United Way of Greater Houston
Wesley Community Center
YMCA of Greater Houston
YWCA of Greater Houston

Basic Needs: Energy Assistance

Position Statement approved by One Voice: November 14, 2008

Issue/Concern: In September 2005, a change in state law withdrew the LITE-UP Texas/System Benefit Fund (SBF) funding for electric bill discounts and shifted that revenue into the State General Revenue Fund. Those who received this discount were the poorest citizens in Texas. Currently, the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUC) only enacts an emergency rule to protect qualified customers against cut-off of electricity when the *National Weather Service* has issued a heat advisory. Those in need of protection must wait through soaring temperatures until that advisory is issued and the PUC authorizes the emergency rule change.

Specific Policy Recommendation(s):

- ★ Reinstatement of LITE-UP Texas System Benefit Fund to provide assistance to eligible households, shifting the full amount out of the State General Revenue Fund.
- ★ Petition the Public Utility Commission of Texas for permanent implementation of the moratorium on electric disconnection during the summer months for low-income elderly (defined as individuals with an income less than 125% of the federal poverty level or individuals who receive public benefits such as food stamps or Medicaid) and critical care customers (defined as individuals for whom an interruption in electrical service would create a dangerous or life-threatening condition-these individuals must be qualified by the transmission and distribution company). Petition for automatic implementation of the same moratorium in the event of a disaster resulting in a State of Emergency declaration.

How does this issue/recommendation relate to prevention and early intervention or maximizing federal funds for health and human services? Electric rates are out of reach for families and individuals with incomes under the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Seniors and small children are most affected by the extreme heat and humidity during the summer months and need to have access to air conditioning. The discount offered by LITE-UP Texas/System Benefit Fund and the protection from cut-off during the most dangerous summer months and emergency situations is a critical need for many of the poorest persons in Texas.

Supporting Facts/Research/Resources:

Since electric utility deregulation in 2002, residential electric rates have increased between forty percent and eighty percent. In 2002, Texas established a *system benefits charge*, a non-bypassable fee of up to 65 cents per megawatt hour, to fund, among other things, low-income rate assistance. This fee created the LITE-UP Texas/System Benefit Fund, which provided eligible households with a ten percent discount on electric bills. Texas residents automatically qualified for this discount if they received benefits such as Food Stamps, Medicaid, or TANF. Others could apply for this discount if their income was at or below 125% of the federal poverty level. In 2005, the Texas Legislature shifted all of the System Benefit Fund (approximately \$427 million) to the State General Revenue Fund. The shifting of these funds to the general revenue fund meant that the state budget was literally balanced on the backs of the poorest citizens in Texas!

80th Legislative Session Outcome: No legislation passed to protect the fund, expand the eligibility requirements, etc. Both HB 551 and SB 482, dealing with deregulating electricity cost for the benefit of low-income customers, failed. The Legislature did pass \$200 million in appropriations for the SBF low-income discount. The Public Utility Commission (PUC) ordered a low-income discount of approximately two cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh). This provides a discount of approximately twelve percent from the highest existing rates.

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