



**Development
Services Agency**

Mike DeWine, Governor
Jon Husted, Lt. Governor

Lydia L. Mihalik, Director

August 8, 2019

FILE

Public Utilities Commission of Ohio
180 E. Broad St.
Columbus, Ohio 43215

PUCO

2019 AUG -8 PM 3:24

RECEIVED-DOCKETING DIV

To Whom It May Concern:

Due to an oversight, the following comments from The Breathing Association and Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc., et al., were not forwarded to the PUCO to be docketed in case 19-0052-AU-ORD. Development respectfully requests the comments be placed in the docket.

Sincerely,

Michael Fraizer
Assistant Chief, Community Services Division

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FILE

July 19, 2019

Ohio Development Services Agency
77 South High Street
Columbus, OH 43215

Public Utilities Commission of Ohio
180 East Broad Street
Columbus, OH 43215

PUCO

2019 AUG -8 PM 3:24

RECEIVED-SOCKETING DIV

RE: PUCO Case No: 19-52-AU-ORD and Ohio Admin. Code Chapter 122:5-3

Submitted via: rule.comment@development.ohio.gov

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments on the Percentage of Income Payment Plan Plus Rule Review.

The Percentage of Income Payment Plan Plus (PIPP Plus) program can be a lifeline for low-income working families who are struggling to keep up with utility payments. PIPP Plus helps make monthly payments more affordable. And, when a PIPP Plus household pays the monthly PIPP Plus payment ontime and in-full, some of their old debt and the rest of that month's bill goes away in the form of a credit on their utility account.

The payment plan can keep low-income Ohioans from filing for bankruptcy to get out from under the burden of utility debt. This is good for utilities who will be able to receive some payment for services provided and good for families who need to keep their lights on and their homes warm.

While recognizing the ease of a single application for the energy assistance programs for both lowincome applicants and for community assistance staff, in some cases the single application is prohibiting access to PIPP Plus for eligible customers.

Because the PIPP Plus rules require PIPP Plus applicants to apply for all energy assistance programs that they may be eligible for, the common application works for most applicants.

However, PIPP Plus is a payment program between customers and their utilities, not a public assistance program. HEAP and other energy assistance programs that receive federal funding have additional eligibility criteria and documentation requirements that are not consistent with the eligibility criteria for the PIPP program found in both PUCO rule OAC 4901:1-18-12 and Development Services Agency rule OAC 122:5-3-02.

In some cases, the eligibility for HEAP is more restrictive than PIPP Plus and requires more documentation such as proof of citizenship for all household members.

To assist agencies in processing applications, the Ohio Development Services Agency issues Ohio Energy Assistance Guidelines. These Guidelines explain eligibility criteria for the energy assistance programs. However, in its attempt to simplify the application review process for all the energy assistance programs, the Guidelines mischaracterize the eligibility criteria and documentation requirements for

PIPP Plus that are found in OAC 4901:1-18-12 and OAC 122:5-3-02. Following these Guidelines, the application itself asks for information that is not needed to determine PIPP Plus eligibility and places an unreasonable burden on families who cannot provide the required documentation such as social security numbers for all members of the household. As a result, some low-income families, who would otherwise be eligible for PIPP Plus, are deterred from applying because of documentation requirements or are incorrectly denied eligibility for the payment program.

In order to provide access to PIPP Plus for all eligible Ohio utility customers, a separate application for PIPP Plus should be available for applicants who do not meet the eligibility and documentation requirements for the federal energy assistance programs.

We ask that the PUCO and the Development Service Agency make the following amendments to PIPP Plus rules to ensure access to the program for all eligible utility customers.

122:5-3-02 Criteria for customer eligibility

Add new language to read:

122:5-3-02 (K) No eligibility criteria that is not included in this section may be used to determine an applicant's eligibility for the PIPP plus program.

122:5-3-03 Procedures for verifying customer eligibility

Revise 122:5-3-02(B) to read:

(B) Eligibility determination.

(1) Application. The director shall identify the customer-level information necessary and useful for purposes of determining customer eligibility and administering customer participation in the PIPP plus program. As provided for in rule 122:5-3-07 of the Administrative Code, the director shall prepare a form of application, which may be a single combined application for all lowincome customer assistance plans. A separate application for PIPP plus shall be available for customers who are not eligible for other public energy assistance programs. The director shall make applications for the PIPP plus program available to customers at various locations and through various publication channels throughout the state, including at local agencies, by request to the office of community assistance and by publication on the development services agency website. The application form may be updated from time to time by the director.

4901:1-18-12 Percentage of income payment plan program eligibility for gas utility service

Add new language to read:

4901:1-18-12(D) (5) A separate application for PIPP plus shall be available for customers who are not eligible for other public energy assistance programs.

We thank you for your consideration of these amendments.

Respectfully submitted by:

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