



New Jersey Board of Public Utilities

NEWS RELEASE

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N.J. Board of Public Utilities Approves TRUE Grant Award for Energy Assistance Program

Temporary Relief for Utility Expenses (TRUE) Program to Provide \$25 Million to the Affordable Housing Alliance for Emergency Utility Assistance

TRENTON, N.J. – Today, the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (Board) voted to award a grant of \$25 million in Temporary Relief for Utility Expenses (TRUE) Program funding to the Affordable Housing Alliance. The one-time assistance program is intended for those low to middle income New Jersey residents who, because of an economic hardship, are struggling to pay their electric and natural gas bills.

The Board's action allocates \$25 million in Societal Benefits Charge (SBC) funds to the nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization for utility assistance grants to low and middle income households seeking temporary assistance. The Affordable Housing Alliance (AHA), with headquarters in Eatontown, N.J., will draw against the funding as needed over a two-year period, to make one-time assistance payments directly to utility companies on behalf of eligible electric and/or natural gas customers who are experiencing an economic hardship.

AHA's proposal includes a maximum annual household benefit of \$1,500, with an estimated average award ranging from \$500 to \$600. The maximum benefit includes a payment of up to \$750 for each utility, electric and natural gas.

The TRUE grant assistance program benefits eligible low and moderate income homeowners and renters who are: New Jersey residents; not enrolled in or eligible for either the Board's Universal Service Fund (USF) program or the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP); facing a crisis situation that includes a documented notice of overdue payment for gas and/or electric service; and have a past history of making regular payments toward their utility bills for which assistance is being sought.

In order to serve eligible residents throughout the state, AHA will accept applications through three methods to encourage a quick, easy and accurate process. AHA clients will soon be able to apply in-person at AHA's home office or at one of AHA's affiliate agencies with existing locations in each county. Also, AHA will establish, in 60 to 90 days, an online database so that eligible residents can retrieve the initial intake form on AHA's website and submit their completed application and the required documents through a secure server that utilizes cloud computing. Because the TRUE program will be automated through a cloud-based platform, clients will be able access the program over an internet connection, such as any computer or mobile device with web access. Therefore, those who need assistance will be able to apply using any public access computer, such as those located at many public libraries, or legislative district offices which provide constituent services.

In addition to the in-person and online application processes, AHA will make applications available via fax, mail and email.

On Nov. 10, 2010, the Board approved a solicitation for proposals from interested nonprofit organizations with the ability to coordinate energy assistance distributions on behalf of eligible limited income households. As part of their proposal package, applicants needed provide documentation of: all federal and state government funding; any funding approved by the Board; a complete accounting of all actual or anticipated expenses and disbursements; and a comprehensive plan to disburse any funds received pursuant to this program. The Board considered funding applicants that proposed a local, regional, or statewide grant program.

The Board received 10 proposals, two of which proposed operating a statewide program. Members of an evaluation committee independently reviewed and scored each proposal on the following criteria: General program approach and plans to meet the requirements of the Notice of Availability of Grants; detailed approach and plans to expeditiously perform the services required by the scope of work of this Notice of Availability of Grants; detailed program budget and cost effectiveness relative to grant award; documented experience with administration of assistance programs and demonstrated results; qualifications and experience of key personnel; and ability to work with electric and gas utilities to implement a program on a statewide basis.

AHA's proposal received the highest average total score. Based on the scoring results and the fact that the highest ranked proposal was for a statewide program, the committee recommended to the Board that they approve AHA's proposal requesting the full \$25 million in available funding to operate a statewide program.

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About the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (NJBPUB)

The NJBPUB is a state agency and regulatory authority mandated to ensure safe, adequate and proper utility services at reasonable rates for New Jersey customers. Critical services regulated by the NJBPUB include natural gas, electricity, water, wastewater, telecommunications and cable television. The Board has general oversight responsibility for monitoring utility service, responding to consumer complaints, and investigating utility accidents. To find out more about the NJBPUB, visit our web site at www.nj.gov/bpu.