

IURC News Release

Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission
101 W. Washington St., Suite 1500 E.
Indianapolis, IN 46204

For Immediate Release

November 19, 2009

Contact Information:

Danielle McGrath

Office: (317) 232-2297

E-mail: dmcgrath@urc.IN.gov

Utilities Authorized to Reinstate Universal Service Programs

Vectren, Citizens and NIPSCO to provide Hoosiers in need with assistance this winter heating season

INDIANAPOLIS – The Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission has authorized Vectren Energy Delivery of Indiana, Inc. (Vectren), Citizens Gas (Citizens) and Northern Indiana Public Service Company (NIPSCO) to reinstate their respective bill assistance programs until each utility can provide the Commission with a more complete record that can be comprehensively reviewed in a base rate case.

Based on information provided by parties to the case, the Commission found the program proposals to present adequate evidence to meet the public interest standard. However, each utility must include its assistance program as part of its requested relief in its next base rate case in order for the Commission to further examine the costs and benefits of the programs. This means that all requests made through base rate cases must be filed before October 31, 2012 in order for the programs to continue, pending the final outcome of each utility's base rate case.

The Commission has also ordered the utilities to contribute at least 25 percent of the program cost to the fund, which is an increase from the 18 to 23 percent contributed in past years. The new amount was required in order to make the contributions more consistent among the utilities and address concerns over the relationship of ratemaking elements that were not presented in this proceeding. Additionally, the utilities are to encourage consumers, who qualify for universal service program (USP) assistance, to apply for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act weatherization assistance program funds in order to create long-term solutions to high energy costs. For tips on weatherization practices, visit the U.S. Department of Energy's Web site at www.energysavers.gov/. This Web site provides useful information about lowering one's utility bills through simple and often times low-cost home improvements.

In addition to the USP funds, other assistance programs are available through the state. The Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority administers the federally-funded Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which helps low-income Hoosiers with natural gas and electric bills. The income qualifications for the LIHEAP program are 150% of the federal poverty level. For example, a family of four making less than \$33,075 would qualify, as well as an individual with an income of \$16,245 or less. The average benefit is around \$360 per year, and is paid in a lump sum directly to the applicant's utility company. Last year, the LIHEAP served more than 197,000 households in Indiana. For a complete list of Community Action Agencies and the areas they serve, please visit www.in.gov/ihcda/2523.htm. Consumers may also call 1-800-872-0371 toll free.

###

The Commission is a fact-finding body that hears evidence in cases filed before it and makes decisions based on the evidence presented in those cases. An advocate of neither the public nor the utilities, the IURC is required by state statute to make decisions that balance the interests of all parties to ensure the utilities provide adequate and reliable service at reasonable prices.