



NYS Public Service Commission

Consumer Services Low Income Programs

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South Asia Regional Energy Partnership Program

Consumer Services

OCS provides consumer **assistance, education,** and **advocacy** services by:

- Assisting consumers in resolving utility disputes.
- Identifying barriers that restrict access to service.
- Carrying out a statewide, multifaceted, bilingual consumer education program.
- Ensuring consumers receive protections provided by the Public Service law and Commission orders.
- Promoting service quality and addressing the needs of low-income and special needs customers.

Low Income Programs

Key Objectives:

- Ensure access to critical utility services
- Enhance rate affordability
- Minimize service terminations

Consumer Service's Role:

- Participate in Commission proceedings
- Work with utilities to help mitigate bill impacts
- Lead Department efforts to coordinate with other NYS agency low-income programs

Utility Based Programs

- Low-income rate assistance programs are part of the rate plans for each major gas and electric utility, including:
 - Payment assistance for eligible participants
 - Referral to state and other assistance programs
 - Financial management education/counseling
- In 2008, approximately 672,000 consumers statewide received some level of low-income assistance
- Total annual funding for rate discount programs in 2008 was \$58.7 million
- OCS worked closely with utilities to encourage added steps to assist special needs consumers during the cold weather period.

Government Based Programs

- Federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
 - NY HEAP
 - Weatherization Programs
- Long Island Power Authority (LIPA)
- NYS Energy Research & Development Authority

Systems Benefits Charge

- Funds collected from charge on energy bill
- Energy efficiency and low income energy affordability are among the objectives
- SBC funding allocated to statewide programs
 - Support for energy efficiency, weatherization, energy and financial management education

Outreach and Education:

Program Goals

- Ensure consumers have information to make decisions about utility service.
- Increase public awareness and understanding of utility issues/programs; encourage responsible action through education.
- Encourage participation in planning and delivery of PSC decisions and programs.
- Ensure consumers know how to get information and provide comments on utility service related issues.

Outreach and Education:

Key Program Elements

- Development and distribution of plain language outreach materials in Spanish and English
- Sponsorship of exhibits at public events and presentations to community groups
- Partnerships with other State agencies, service organizations and local governments
- Web site and toll-free lines
- Mass media

Outreach and Education:

LOW-INCOME FORUM ON ENERGY

- Statewide initiative launched in 1998.
- Governed by steering committee, chaired by OCS staff member, comprised of PSC, NYSERDA, state agencies, utilities, community action agencies, and low-income advocates.
- Goal: understand issues that impact low income New Yorkers' access to safe, affordable and reliable energy.
- Designed to strengthen the programs and resources available for low-income customers.

Telephone Assistance

- Lifeline Telephone Discount Service
- New York State Relay Service
- CapTel Telephone Service

For More Information

Web sites:

- www.dps.state.ny.us
- www.AskPSC.com

Toll-free Lines:

- 1-888-ASKPSC1 (1-888-275-7721)

Contact me: erin_odell-keller@dps.state.ny.us