



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

DEPARTMENT OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND ENERGY

ORDER OPENING INVESTIGATION

D.T.E. 98-124

December 23, 1998

Investigation, on the Department of Telecommunications and Energy's own motion, to receive comments regarding the costs and benefits of expanding the eligibility for low-income discount rates established in Section 193(1F)(4)(i) of the Electric Restructuring Act.

The Electric Restructuring Act of 1997 states that, as of March 1, 1998, electric power distribution companies must provide low income discount rates to eligible customers comparable to the low income discount rates currently in effect. St. 1997, c. 164, §193(1F)(4)(i). The cost of these discount rates will be included in rates charged to all other customers. The statute states that eligibility for these discount rates is based on verification of a low-income customer's receipt of a means-tested public benefit, or eligibility for the low-income home energy assistance program, or its successor program, for which eligibility does not exceed 175% of the federal poverty level based on a household's gross income. According to the Restructuring Act, public benefits may include transitional assistance for needy families; supplemental security income; emergency assistance to elders, disabled, and children; food stamps; public housing; federally-subsidized or state-subsidized housing; the low-income energy assistance program; veterans' benefits; and similar benefits. Eligibility guidelines for these public benefit programs will be made available to the electric power distribution companies by the Division of Energy Resources.

The Restructuring Act of 1997 charges the Department of Telecommunications and Energy ("Department") with conducting an investigation and reporting to the Joint Committee on Government Regulations regarding the cost and benefits of expanding the eligibility for low-income discount rates established in Section 193(1F)(4)(i) of the Act (i.e., receipt of a means-tested public benefit) to include those customers who are eligible for any means-tested public benefit for which eligibility does not exceed 175 per cent of the federal poverty level based on gross household income. The Department is required to conduct the investigation and file a report, with any necessary recommendations, before March 1, 1999.

The Department invites comments from the public on the expansion of the eligibility requirement low-income discount rates. The Department also invites persons to provide draft legislative language to accomplish this expansion. Comments and draft legislative language

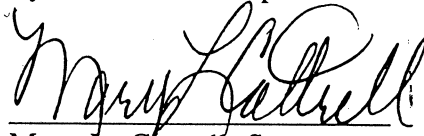
must be received by the Department no later than the close of business (5:00 p.m.) Friday, January 22, 1999. One original and 3 copies of all comments and draft legislative language should be filed with:

Mary L. Cottrell, Secretary
Re: D.T.E. 98-124
Department of Telecommunications and Energy
Leverett Saltonstall Building
100 Cambridge Street, Room 1210
Boston, MA 02202

Any questions or comments for the Department may be addressed to:

Noelle A. Byrnes
Hearing Officer
Department of Telecommunications & Energy
Leverett Saltonstall Building
100 Cambridge Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02202
617-305-3500

By Order of the Department


Mary L. Cottrell, Secretary

Consent Communication #19

5-21

A communication was received from the Department of Telecommunication and Energy, transmitting an order opening investigation to receive comments regarding the costs and benefits of expanding the elibility for low-income discount rates established in Section 193(1F)(4)(I) of the Electric Restructing Act.

In City Council January 11, 1999

Referred to the City Manager