

January 14, 2011

Stan Wise
Chairman
Georgia Public Service Commission
244 Washington Street, SW
Atlanta, GA 30334

In Re: Docket No. 15326, Universal Service Fund

Dear Chairman Wise,

As you know, one of the purposes of the Universal Service Fund (“USF”) is to “[assist] low-income residential consumers in times of emergency as determined by the commission.” (O.C.G.A. § 46-4-161(a)(3)).

In years past, the Commission has ordered that funds be disbursed from the Universal Service Fund in order to assist low-income consumers. A review of PSC press releases from 2004 to the present documents the Commission’s longstanding practice of recognizing the needs of the most vulnerable Georgians, to wit:

- 1) On May 4, 2010, the Commission approved the distribution of up to \$500,000 in matching funds from the USF to the Georgia Department of Human Services (“DHS”) for the Fresh Start Program, which monies were used to assist low-income natural gas customers served on Atlanta Gas Light Company’s (“AGLC”) distribution system;
- 2) On February 21, 2008, the Commission approved a \$6.6 million disbursement from the USF to the Georgia Department of Human Resources (“DHR”), enabling more than 26,000 low-income Georgia households on the AGLC distribution system to receive grants of up to \$250 each to help pay their winter natural gas bills;
- 3) On December 19, 2006, the Commission approved a USF disbursement of more than \$5 million to fund a \$150 credit to the natural gas bill of each recipient of the AGLC low-income senior discount, to assist seniors who struggle to pay their home heating bills;
- 4) On October 4, 2005, the Commission approved a \$6 million USF disbursement to the Georgia DHR. These funds supplemented the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (“LIHEAP”), which DHR administers; and
- 5) On November 2, 2004, the Commission approved a USF disbursement of \$3 million to provide relief to qualified low-income consumers and senior citizens in paying their natural gas bills.

As reflected by the list above, the Commission has consistently and compassionately exercised its discretion under Georgia law by finding that emergency conditions exist to warrant a distribution from the USF in order to assist low-income residential customers. Georgia Watch applauds the Commission for its willingness to alleviate the burden on the most vulnerable Georgians by disbursing USF funds for this very worthy purpose.

As December 2010 newspaper articles¹ reported, hundreds of people lined up outside the Mansour Center in Marietta, which provides assistance to low-income families, to apply for assistance with heat and power bills. On December 3, hundreds of people lined up outside the offices of the Fulton-Atlanta Community Action Authority (“CAA”) to apply for LIHEAP assistance.² Joyce Dorsey, president and CEO of the Fulton-Atlanta CAA said that the recent demand for heating assistance is the worst she’s seen in her 20 years with the CAA.³ Counties throughout the state are experiencing a high volume of requests for help.

Given the severe economic crisis our state is weathering, the extreme weather conditions this past week, and the demonstrated and unprecedented need among Georgia citizens for energy assistance, Georgia Watch urges the Commission to approve a \$7 million dollar disbursement from the USF to assist low-income residential customers served on AGLC’s system.

As of December 2010, the unencumbered balance of the USF was approximately \$30 million dollars. Given the amount of funds available in the USF, a \$7 million disbursement is both reasonable and consistent with the Commission’s previously approved disbursements. Georgia Watch appreciates the Commission’s commitment to providing much-needed assistance to Georgians in need and hopes that the Commission will see fit to approve a \$7 million USF disbursement to the Georgia Department of Human Services as soon as possible. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Clare McGuire
Director, Consumer Energy Program
Georgia Watch

¹ <http://www.ajc.com/news/cobb/hundreds-line-up-in-763455.html>

² <http://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta/hundreds-apply-for-heating-764999.html>

³ <http://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta/hundreds-apply-for-heating-764999.html>

cc: Commissioner Chuck Eaton
Commissioner Tim Echols
Commissioner Doug Everett
Commissioner Lauren "Bubba" McDonald, Jr.
Reece McAlister, Executive Secretary
Tom Bond, Director of Utilities
Nancy Tyer, Natural Gas Division Director
Tony Wackerly, Utilities Analyst, Natural Gas Division