

National Grid – A Broken System for 54,777 Homes:

H6079 part of the Fix

From April 2007 to March 2008, 54,681 payment plans were negotiated for electric bill that were too high to pay. 54,777 plans (over 100%) were broken.

Utility shut-offs in 2008 hit another record breaking high of 32,378. Foreclosures drove up utility shut-offs for all classes of customers. Protections languish with the lack of state funding for the "Affordable Energy" legislation passed in 2006. The broken payment system is a sad truth.

We fought back and won limited victories:

- Reduction of down-payment requirements to 10% for restoring and preventing immediate utility shut offs through December 2008.
- Public Utilities Commission ruling on interpreting existing rules to allow continued service of protected customers who move during the winter moratorium.

These victories, combined with advocacy work around utility rights, resulted in a 34% decrease in utility shut-offs in protected households (4,000 too many!).

We need laws to ensure that people have electricity and an energy source for cooking and heating at home. Global warming and energy crises demand urgent action for justice. Let's get to 0 shut-offs, starting with affordable payment plans, extension of the Winter Moratorium to May 1st (call PUC Commissioner Germani & legislators) and weatherization for all low-income homes!

Priority RI Legislation

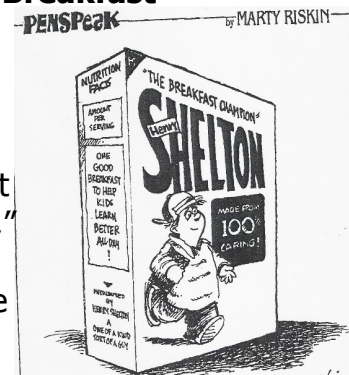
- **2009 – H-6079 - Home Energy Rate Affordability Act** – This amended version of our 2008 bill (sponsored by Rep. Handy and Sen. Miller) was submitted after the George Wiley Center advocates met with Speaker Murphy and gathered 5,000 petition signatures in support of affordable energy legislation. Without state funding, a modest fee on residences (\$1.40 -- the price of a cup of coffee a month) is proposed to guarantee the dignity of lights and hot water for those living at or below 150% of the poverty line. The bill requires fixed monthly payments toward gas and electric bills each month, with LIHEAP and consumers kicking in the difference. The bill also encourages conservation by charging full rates for usage above normal ranges. This law will stop the dangerous and costly practice of utility shut-offs for most very low-income households.

- **2009 Universal Breakfast H5352/S112**

"My children will eat breakfast and lunch at school, but they won't eat at a soup kitchen," a recently unemployed Providence mother cried to Organizer Julie

Silvia. Universal Breakfast, which is served in schools at no fee to students, has proved to increase participation. In Rhode Island 26 schools with high (40%) student enrollments from low-income households

(Continued on page two)



Priority RI Legislation (continued)

are not currently in the program. Universal Breakfast reaches at least 10% more students, than schools with the regular Breakfast program. Innovations in "grab 'n go" and classroom breakfast put into effect in places as diverse as New York City and rural Vermont reach up to 98% of the students. Studies show that when children eat breakfast in school, there are improvements in attendance, lateness, mental focus, behavior, grades, and test scores.

- **2009 EITC H5404/S122** – An economic stimulus. EITC is known to be an effective stimulus tax. This tax break allows low-wage workers to spend a tax refund on basics. Now, RI income tax credit filers can get a credit (if they owe RI income tax) of 25% of their federal EITC. However, if the tax filer is due a refund, get out the calculator to do division and cut that refund down. RI only refunds 3.75% of federal EITC! Within five years, this tax change will generate tax revenue and help the state budget due to its stimulus effect. This tax is a structural change that will help RI in the long run and Rhode Islanders earning low wages immediately!
- We also support eliminating the flat tax, increasing capital gains, and combined corporate reporting y to fix our state's budget crisis, caused in part by huge tax cuts to the wealthy.

SNAP into ACTION

Last legislative session, the Governor blocked H7817, the food stamp recertification bill. It would trim the unnecessary, 6-month personal interviews that RI requires of most food stamp recipients. Rules like these earned RI low scores on national rankings for delivery of federal nutrition to eligible persons. We have been protesting at policy meetings and in public for various reforms, some of which are in effect.

It took a lot of organizing to push the DHS, the Energy Office and the Governor to make a simple change in food stamps for people without electric or gas bills. This policy change, effective November 2008, increased food stamp benefits by an average of \$86/month, or \$9.7+ million year. That \$\$\$ for RI. **U. S. Congressman**

Patrick Kennedy helped and will be honored with a "Food Stamp of Approval" Award on April 25th! We still need to push for food stamp reform. On April 4th, we marched for:

- Hiring 31 more Food Stamp Eligibility Techs to end long waits for service and mandatory overtime
- Cutting the 28 page application down to 4 pages to save time on processing & simplify applying
- Extending Food Stamp hours to Saturdays and evenings so working people can apply
- Adding the 50,000 underserved RI'ers to SNAP

Thanks to our Supporters!

We can't mention in this newsletter everyone who supports our work with donations of time and money. We thank you all and give special acknowledgement to our champion supporters.

2008 Gifts of \$10,000 or more

Fund For Community Progress
Hassenfeld Family Foundation
Mazon A Jewish Response to Hunger
Providence Plan/New Roots

2008 Gifts of \$5,000 or more

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Daniel Rothenberg
Women's Fund of RI

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University of Rhode Island Ice Rink Events
Rev. Donald W. Whipple

**Call your legislators to support H-6079 –
Home Energy Rate Affordability Act**

Save the date: Saturday, April 25th

“Stimulating Economic Justice”

A solution oriented event to end:

- utility shut-offs and create a just residential energy system
- hunger with effective food stamp and universal breakfast programs
- low-incomes with tax justice and create high wage, green jobs

Thank you to our major event sponsors:

Local 328, United Food & Commercial Workers

Motley-Rice

Working Rhode Island

Thank you to our workshop sponsors:

Bank RI

Jay Glasson, Esq.

Providence Local 387, APUW

BlueCross / Blue Shield

Lifespan

Donald Tufts



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