

Shut-Offs: a Solvable Crisis

A responsible and sustainable energy policy must include supports for a minimum consumption of energy for residential consumers.

We have had success lowering the number of shut-offs for protected customers in 2008 by extending the Winter Moratorium two weeks and involving hundreds in temporarily holding off a shut off by exercising their right to an informal hearing or "review." Utility shut-offs in 30,000+ RI households in 2007 are a big social problem for all of us: a problem created by all RI energy users. Low incomes and wages -- for retired, disabled and low wage workers -- cause the problem. The loss of electric or gas service due to low-incomes results in losses of adult job productivity, poor educational performance of children and increased health problems for all ages. We can prevent this in 2008!

H-7877, the Low Income Energy Cost Assistance Plan, submitted by Rep. Art Handy, is a good investment in Rhode Island's economy!

Closing the gap between the incomes paid (by businesses to low-wage workers) and the incomes needed (for a basic, minimal standard of living) helps us all. Income spent on goods (food, rent, or medicine) other than utilities has a greater multiplier effect, promotes increased job creation, and stabilizes low-income neighborhoods.

To end the mishandling of our public utility policies, a plan is needed so that Rhode Islanders can afford to pay for the electric and natural gas services required for a minimal standard of living at home. ❖

Other Heat & Eat Bills

- **H8126/S2608** – This amended bill protects families with children three years of age and under from shut-offs. RI Campaign members met with Dr. Gifford, Director, RI Department of Health, to win his support for this legislation. The bill now sits in the House and Senate Corporations Committees. Let your legislators and Dr. Gifford know how important this legislation is!
- **H7686/S2182** – Now, qualified working tax payers who receive a state income tax credit can **only** get a refund of **3.75%** of federal EITC! This is unfair. This bill is a needed and important structural reform for Rhode Island that is proven to grow the economy.



Please call your Senators and Representatives and ask them to support this important legislation!

- **H7403/S2347** brings Universal Free Breakfast to severe need public schools. This bill, heard by the House Finance Committee, has stalled. Call your Representatives and tell them this bill will increase \$5 million in federal funds that improving children's health and school performance while boosting the local economy. Visit the Hunger - School Breakfast Coalition link on our web site.
- **H7817**— Passed (on the House side) to reduce the number of visits that most applicants must make to DHS office in order to continue receiving food stamps. Under this bill, most applicants will have personal interviews once a year, instead of every six months. Call the Senate Health & Human Services Committee Chairperson Rhoda Perry and ask her to work for the bills passage. ❖

Register Now! Women's Advocacy Training Classes Round Two

The George Wiley Center's successful program, "Empowering Women for Socio-Economic Justice" has been refunded for a second year through a \$7,500 grant from the Women's Fund!

Do you want to join us? We are looking for women to take part in a 20 hour training program to become strong advocates for both themselves and other women facing utility shut-offs and welfare cuts. Assistance with transportation and childcare is available so barriers to participation are reduced. Call us for more details on how you can make a difference! ❖

National Grid Rate Increases

National Grid wants another natural gas raise – about \$72 per year for most customers. This is more than what many can afford already.

There is room for negotiations here! The anticipated cost per residential customer to end shut-offs under H7877 is about \$1.50 per month. With two more rate increases during 2008 expected to add \$28/month to consumers' bills. We can lower this estimate and still include \$1.50/month to pay for energy justice. Now is the time to fight for fair energy prices for all residents! Consider:

- National Grid's (NG) profits are up 24%
- NG asked the PUC for permission to double its return on investment from 4.7% to 9%.

While we understand the need to replace aging gas lines and invest in new solar and wind technology, this need not be accompanied by price gouging at the expense of the poor. **Please join us in demanding that National Grid 'Play fair!' and that consumers 'Pay Fair' at an upcoming Public Utility Commission Hearing:**

Tuesday, June 17th at 6 PM
Council Chambers, Middletown Town Hall
350 East Main Road, Middletown

Tuesday, June 24th at 7 PM
Council Chambers, Warwick City Hall
3275 Post Road, Warwick

Monday, September 8 at 9:30 AM
Public Utilities Commission
89 Jefferson Boulevard, Warwick

Are your bills too high to pay? Are you at risk of a shut-off? Come to a PUC hearing, share your personal story – and bring friends! ❖

It's a Winning Plan!



Members Protest at the PUC

Pauline Moyé & MET student A Johnny, Newport members, joined the 100 + person crowd at the Division of Public Utilities offices on May 1st!

George Wiley Center members protested unaffordable payment plans to prevent a repeat of last year's 933 shut-offs of "protected" customers in May 2007. Eighty-seven people facing a shut-off asserted their right to an informal hearing (or "review") and temporarily halted their shut-offs at the "mass" request for a hearing. Dues to this action and awareness campaign, there were only 90 shut-offs for protected customers in May 2008. That's a **90.4% decrease in shut-offs** than in May 2007! However, we still need to pass H-7877 (PIPP). In May 2008, 1423 RI households classified as "standard" customers couldn't afford to pay for basic energy needs.

*The PUC and the "Division" has the jurisdiction to grant an **exception** to the provisions of their regulations to any party for **good cause** shown? Call the PUC at **780-2110** to exercise YOUR **RIGHTS and TEMPORARILY STOP YOUR SHUT-OFF!***

Food Stamp Changes Afoot

Months after RI Campaign to Eliminate Childhood Poverty members presented solutions to the Governor and DHS concerning Rhode Island's failing grades serving individuals who qualify for federal food stamps, progress is being made.

Since April, progress has been made:

- Providence DHS office is open for a few hours on some Saturdays for limited service. This benefits working families who can attend food stamp eligibility appointments without losing time out of work.
- Governor Carcieri opened 7 FS eligibility technician jobs for laterally transferring state workers. RI loses federal dollars due to worker shortages in servicing eligible people. Caseloads still exceed minimum standards.
- **H-7817** has passed in the House (see page one), relieving low-income persons of the extra expense of non-required trips to DHS offices.

Let's keep the pressure on the Governor and the Energy Office to implement the **H-EAT** program, in which \$1/year in LIHEAP funds means an extra \$25/month in Food Stamps. **Net gain to Rhode Island: \$500,000 for food for hungry people.** ❖

Canned Food Drive

Drop off canned goods and non-perishable dry goods at the George Wiley Center for the Pawtucket Soup Kitchen run by Ernie Marot. You can stop by the George Wiley Center on 32 East Avenue in Pawtucket Tuesday through Friday from 9 until 5.

Member News - RI Consumers Fight Back!

A new problem solving team grows out of the RI Campaign to Eliminate Childhood Poverty in northwestern RI.

Consumers Fighting Back focuses on energy-related problems and meets every Wednesday from 2-3 PM at the Gloucester-Manton Library in Chepachet. The group developed a customer survey. Findings will be presented on **August 9th** at **Townsmens Club in Mapleville**. Interested? Contact George Wiley Center member Gael Taddeo at 568-4387 for more info. ❖

Wiley Center Distributes Bulbs

Thank you to LiveCooler for donating 300 compact fluorescent light bulbs to low-income families who attended our annual conferences!

Do you need to save \$10-\$15/month on electricity? The George Wiley Center is working with *Project 20/20* to install free CFL bulbs in low-income Providence households. To lower your electric bill & carbon footprint, call 728-5555.

Thank you for supporting our Mission

We are working hard to do more to meet the community's increasing needs. Thanks to all our contributors for sending in \$4,888 in response to our recent appeal and to:

- OOP! for donating 10% of profits from sales on May 8th
- Community Forum Sponsors: Blue Cross and Blue Shield, Citizens Bank, Episcopal Diocese of RI, Johnson & Wales University, Pawtucket Red Sox, Sensata Technologies & in-kind donors, including Pepsi Bottling Group, Stop & Shop Newport, Caserta's Bakery and Sunrise Bagels
- Wiley Legacy Sponsors: Burton Bultoch, Esq., Thomas Glynn, Local 121, MetLife, Bob Morrow, Jean Rosiello, Esq., Mary and Michael Schwartz Family Trust at The Rhode Island Foundation, Donald Tufts, Whole Foods Market of University Heights, American Postal Workers Union, Jay Glasson, Esq., Rev. Donald Whipple, the Wiley Family and Betsy Florin.
- New Roots Providence capacity-building grant award of \$15,000
- Christ the King Parish, Stewardship Giving Grant 2008

Please make a donation directly to the George Wiley Center or as your designee through The Fund for Community Progress. ❖

The Legacy of George Wiley – 35th Anniversary Commemoration

George Wiley organized and empowered tens of thousands civil and welfare rights activists during his lifetime. Join us, biographer Nick Kotz and the Wiley family in honoring his life and the ongoing work for economic justice! Donations to the fundraiser will be accepted at the door. (Suggested donation: \$75)

June 18th Gathering to Honor George Wiley

5-7 PM @ Local 121

121 Washington St., Providence, RI

Special thanks to the Wiley family, MetLife, Donald Tufts, Local 121, Betsy Florin, our Board Chair, for organizing our event!

URI Diversity Week – September 2008

"Does George A. Wiley's Life-Work Matter Today?"

The workshop will explore the work of George Wiley. Presenters include Alice Dzen Gross, Henry Shelton, and playwright Ricardo Pitts Wiley. The group plans to raise funds for a play commemorating George Wiley.



*George Wiley, 1931-1973
Associate National Director of
CORE and Founder of the
National Welfare Rights,
Organization*

Fall Annual Silent Auction

Tentatively scheduled for November 12th.



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