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August 12, 2011

Ms. Kirsten Walli  
Board Secretary  
Ontario Energy Board  
2300 Yonge Street  
Suite 2700  
Toronto, Ontario, M4P 1E4

Dear Ms. Walli:

**Re: EB-2010-0280 – Low -Income Related Customer Service Standards - Comments of the London Property Management Association**

**Introduction**

The Ontario Energy Board ("Board") issued a letter dated June 29, 2011 seeking stakeholder input in developing low-income related customer service standards for rate-regulated gas distributors.

On June 29, 2011 the Board issued its Gas Distribution Access Rule ("GDAR") amendments in relation to customer service standards for residential customers. The Board proposed a less prescriptive approach than that used for electricity distributors, while at the same time ensuring that customer service standards of rate regulated gas distributors were fair and enforceable

In the June 29, 2011 letter, the Board asked the gas distributors to review the low-income related customer service rules for electricity distributors posted on the Board's website, document the current low-income related policies and practices in the areas addressed by those rules and suggest new or modified policies that would be appropriate for gas distributors. The Board described this as the first stage of the low-income related customer service standards consultation.

Both Union Gas ("Union") and Enbridge Gas Distribution Inc. ("Enbridge") filed their responses and submissions regarding the low-income related customer service standards on July 22, 2011. Kitchener Utilities also filed comments on the same date.

As part of the second stage of the low-income consultation, the Board asked for stakeholder comment on the information provided by the distributors in the first stage. Stakeholders were also asked to provide their input on the two specific questions posed in the June 29, 2011 letter.

These are the comments and responses to the questions posed by the Board on behalf of the London Property Management Association ("LPMA").

### **Comments on Distributor Submissions**

LPMA has reviewed in detail the submissions of Union, Enbridge and Kitchener Utilities. The comments provided below are specific to the Union Gas submissions, but have been informed by the submissions of the other two distributors.

As a general comment, LPMA agrees with the distributors that their current low-income customer service policies are functioning effectively and are in the interest of both customers and the distributors.

In particular, LPMA supports a less prescriptive approach to low-income customer service standards. The distributors current arrears management practices, as highlighted in their July 22, 2011 responses are flexible and are sensitive to the needs of all customers, including low-income customers. LPMA does not believe that special or unique rules are required for low-income customers.

LPMA echoes the concerns expressed by both Union and Enbridge that a prescriptive approach to low-income customer service rules will limit the flexibility that both distributors use to accommodate the needs of individual customers. LPMA submits that

it in the best interest of all customers to maintain the flexibility to negotiate mutually acceptable arrangements that reflect an individual customer's situation.

LPMA has reviewed the current processes and the proposed amendments as filed by both Union and Enbridge on July 22, 2011. LPMA supports both of these submissions and believes that the Board should approve those processes and the proposed amendments.

### **Responses to Specific Questions**

***1. Are current low-income customer service standards, along with the proposed modifications and enhancements, sufficient to ensure reasonable consistency across the province and appropriate levels of service for low-income customers such that a less prescriptive approach to Board oversight is warranted?***

LPMA does not support the development of rules which would prescribe specific low-income customer service standards that would be applicable to all rate regulated gas distributors. As noted earlier in these comments, LPMA believes that this may result in limiting or eliminating flexibility that Union currently has in dealing with low-income customers. This flexibility has a value not only to Union, but also to the low-income customers affected. As indicated in its Submissions dated July 22, 2011, Union works with its customers and social agencies to find solutions tailored to the individual customer. The ability to tailor solutions to individual circumstances helps to improve customer satisfaction and to minimize disconnections.

LPMA further agrees with Union that the prescriptive approach would likely lead to higher rates because of the increased costs related to implementation and ongoing management of the rules. LPMA believes that higher costs should be avoided wherever and whenever possible since these increased costs are ultimately paid for by all customers, including low-income customers.

Ratepayers could end up paying more for a system that offers them less flexibility, less satisfaction and results in more disconnections than does the current system. LPMA does not believe such an outcome is either desirable or appropriate.

***2. If so, should the Board adopt the same approach as that proposed for customer service standards in general (i.e., require each rate-regulated gas distributor to develop, publish and adhere to low-income related customer service standards for certain prescribed areas of customer service, include a complaint process with recourse to the Board)?***

In the June 29, 2011 letter related to the Notice of Proposal to Amend a Rule the Board found "*merit in the positions of the Responding Distributors and other interested stakeholders with respect to maintaining some flexibility over gas distributor customer service standards and practices at this time. The Board believes that adopting a less prescriptive approach will limit the cost implications for ratepayers while nonetheless ensuring that gas distributor customer service standards and practices are transparent and ultimately enforceable by the Board.*"

LPMA submits that if the Board follows a less prescriptive approach for general customer service rules, then it should approach the rules in the same manner for the low-income customers. These low-income customer service rules should align with those for general customers.

Sincerely,

***Randy Aiken***

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