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**Sent:** Monday, December 12, 2005 10:39 AM  
**To:** kim.happy@psc.mo.gov  
**Subject:** Comments on case 6x-2006-0181

Please file the following comments on EFIS in the matter of case 6x-2006-0181, emergency CWR. I can be reached at 314 754-4485.

Jacqueline A. Hutchinson.

Low-Income families in Missouri find themselves faced with unexpected financial cost this winter caused by the increase in natural gas prices. Those families living at or near the federal poverty line faced the greatest hardship. In the St. Louis area we have seen applications for assistance double while our ability to serve those in need remains an unknown amount, most likely less than last winter. St. Louis City and County have seen a doubling of applications for assistance from 4500 in the City to last year this time, to approximately 10,000 applications for assistance to date and approximately 8000 in St. Louis County.

Many applications and inquiries about assistance have come from working poor families who do not qualify for federal assistance and cannot meet the high cold weather rule turn-on amount. The 80% provisions of the current cold weather rule has quickly depleted agency funds to assist families, and several thousand families in the St. Louis area remain without heat due to the high amounts needed to restore services. In a review of 1500 recently rejected pledges made to Laclede Gas more than half of the cases required more than \$800 to restore services.

This rapid depletion of funds means that those who seek assistance in the coming months may find that there are not funds available to assist them. At the current rate of spending, we expect to spend all of the funds promised through the Dollar Help fund in St. Louis city and County by years end, and all federal crisis funds by the end of January.

We would therefore like to support the emergency Cold Weather Rule and recommend the following modifications to the Public Counsel's alternative plan.

1. To restore services to those families with service off for 50% of their current arrears or \$500 whichever is less, even if they have defaulted on a previous rule.
2. Extend payment arrangements on arrears for at least 2 years to allow families to have more realistic CWR payment amounts.
3. To allow all low-income customers who make monthly payments of at least \$60 per month to maintain their service through March 31<sup>st</sup>.
4. Waive late pay and reconnect charges for all low-income families during the CWR period November 1 through March 31. (Public counsel's provision sounds like these fee will return if families are unable to keep their payment plans)