



# LIFE 2004 Statewide Conference Final Conference Report

## *Home, Hearth and Opportunity*

The Low-Income Forum on Energy (LIFE) 2004 Statewide Conference convened at the Prime Hotel in Saratoga Springs on November 8 and 9, 2004 to continue New York's statewide dialogue on the energy needs of low-income energy customers. The Forum, sponsored by the New York State Public Service Commission and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, brought together 142 participants representing 77 organizations from across New York State. Participants in the dialogue included representatives of community-based organizations, utility companies, Energy Services Companies, state agencies, local government, statewide nonprofit organizations, community action/weatherization agencies, and businesses.

Several critical themes emerged during the two-day event. Among them:

- The energy affordability gap is large and getting larger for low-income households.
- Energy affordability is critical for all low-income customers but is especially important for customers who rely on non-utility fuel sources (oil, kerosene, propane) which have limited affordability strategies available.
- The System Benefits Charge has been a critical resource for helping low-income households address their energy burden and should continue to do so.
- The link between housing and energy and the resources that address both needs to be stronger.
- Regional and local energy funding options such as Fuel Funds should be

developed and more widely available in New York.

- Networking and collaboration are important tools for bringing resources together to help low-income households obtain safe, affordable energy. They need to be encouraged.
- New York can learn a great deal from the experiences of low-income resource programs in other states.
- Energy Efficiency Programs are effective tools for helping low-income households address their energy burden. Leveraging the resources of these programs is critical.
- Many low-income households are facing forced mobility as they lose their housing due to high energy costs that they can't afford. Forced mobility has many, other economic and social impacts for households and communities.
- Many low-income households are not adequately prepared for emergencies which result in loss of power. Building strong relationships between the energy, housing and emergency preparedness organizations in each community is essential to address this gap.
- It is important to understand the role that income-extending strategies such as the Earned Income Tax Credit can play in helping low-income customers to afford their energy costs.
- As energy costs continue to rise, federal HEAP funding has not kept pace. As a

result, HEAP benefits are buying less energy than they used to.

- As energy costs continue to rise, other goods and services also increase in cost which puts further strain on the economic stability of low-income households. What do we do to assist customers who have run out of assistance?
- The difficulty of applying for housing grants and loans is a barrier to applying.

The 2004 Statewide Conference marked the fourth statewide conference sponsored since LIFE's inception in 1998. Participants were welcomed by Public Service Commission Chairman William M. Flynn. Lieutenant Governor Mary O. Donohue was the featured opening speaker. Martin Insogna, Utility Consumer Program Specialist for the New York State Dept. of Public Service and Chair of the LIFE Steering Committee, served as Master of Ceremonies throughout the conference.

The Conference Program featured three topic tracks (Resources, Technology and Markets) as well as several plenary sessions for all participants. The Plenary Sessions included:

*Energy Markets: What's New and What it Means for Low-Income Customers.* This session provided a foundation on the issues associated with energy markets in New York and the potential impact that these issues could have on low-income customers. Panelists: Jeffrey Stockholm/New York State Department of Public Service, Jerrold Oppenheim/Democracy and Regulation, and Craig Goodman/National Energy Marketers Association

*Home, Hearth and Opportunity.* This session explored the role that energy plays in helping low-income households maintain safe, affordable housing, the difficult choices that households make regarding their energy burden, and the opportunities and barriers that exist in strengthening the housing/energy connection. Panelists: Roger Colton/Fisher, Sheehan and

Colton, Michael Corso, New York State Department of Public Service (moderator).

*Town Meeting on the System Benefits Charge.* This presentation and group discussion introduced the System Benefits Charge (SBC) and explored how the SBC has been used to assist low-income energy customers. It also provided an opportunity for LIFE participants to consider the next round of SBC funding and its potential for addressing the continuing needs of low-income energy customers. Panelists: Rick Gerardi/NYSERDA and Peggie Neville/NYSERDA (moderator).

*Preparing Low-Income Customers for the Upcoming Heating Season and the Role that LIHEAP and Other Resources Will Play.* This session considered how organizations at the local, state, and national levels are preparing for the upcoming heating season: what they are doing to assist low-income customers and what they are doing to encourage the availability and effective use of LIHEAP and other resources. Panelists: Robert Christopher/ Saratoga Department of Social Services, Bruce Bowdy/New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, George Coling/National Fuel Funds Network

In addition to the plenary sessions, LIFE participants had the opportunity to choose from among a dozen break-out sessions on special topics. These sessions were organized in tracks (technology, resources, housing and energy, and markets) and are summarized in the following sections.

## **Resources**

*Oil Buying Strategies.* This session featured the five-county HEAP Heating Oil Pilot sponsored jointly by the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority. Panelists. Sue Montgomery Corey/Community Power Network of New York State, Peggie Neville/New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (Moderator), and Bruce Bowdy/New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance.

*Fuel Funds: What They Are and How They Can Benefit Low-Income Energy Customers.* This session introduced the National Fuel Fund Network and how the fuel fund model can be used to assist low-income customers in two regions of New York. Panelists: George Coling/National Fuel Fund Network, Lynda Pugh/National Fuel Gas Company, and Joseph Guarinello/HeartShare.

*Strategies for Keeping Vulnerable Energy Customers Safe in Extreme Temperatures or Other Energy Disruptions.* This new element to the LIFE Dialogue began the discussion of how energy disruptions (household-specific and community-wide) impact low-income households and how various participants in the energy and emergency services networks are working to ensure that vulnerable households (low-income and others) are safe in these challenging situations. Panelists: Les Radford/New York State Emergency Management Office, Paula Gilbert/NYSEG, Elizabeth Katz/New York State Department of Public Service, and Sue Montgomery Corey/Community Power Network of New York State (moderator).

*Helping Low-Income Customers Extend Their Buying Power.* This session explored two initiatives which can extend the buying power for low-income households: the Earned Income Tax Credit and Telephone Lifeline. Panelists: Charles Brennan/Public Utility Law Project and Kay Victorson/Winning Beginning New York.

*Consumer Protection.* This session explored New York's consumer protection rules. Historically among the strongest in the country, the core of our State's consumer protection rules is the Home Energy Fair Practices Act (HEFPA). The session was a reprise of one of the "greatest hits" from the spring LIFE Regional Meeting Series. Panelists: Ben Wiles/Public Utility Law Project and Bill Mills/New York State Department of Public Service.

## **Housing and Energy**

*Engaging Federal Housing and Community Development Programs in Projects that Benefit Low-Income Customers.* This session explored federally-funded opportunities that can be the key to success and can be leveraged to help low-income customers address their energy needs. Panelists: George Von Pless/United

States Department of Agriculture Rural Development, Albert Jurczynski/Governor's Office of Small Cities, Edward DePaula/United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, Patrick Fitzgerald/New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (moderator).

*The Impact of Forced Mobility on Low-Income Families and the Role that Energy Plays.* This session explored the impacts resulting from the difficult choices made by low-income households with high energy burdens and the steps that can be taken to mitigate those impacts. Panelists: Tina Zerbian/Cattaraugus Community Action and Roger Markovics/United Tenants of Albany, Sue Montgomery Corey/Community Power Network of New York State (moderator).

*Bringing Energy Efficiency and Housing Resources Together.* This session will explore the roles that housing quality and ownership play on energy burden and that housing resource programs can play in addressing energy burden. Opportunities for bringing together energy efficiency and housing resources together were also discussed. Panelists: Tom Carey/New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, Elaine Akley/KeySpan-Long Island Power Authority, and John Ahearn/New York State Energy Research and Development Authority.

## **Technology**

*Incorporating Green Building/Renovation Techniques into Publicly-funded Housing Initiatives.* This session explored the transfer of green building techniques into low-income housing and homeownership opportunities. Panelists: Ann Heidenreich, Community Energy Services, Sunari Silva/Habitat for Humanity of New York City and Lori Clark/New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (Moderator).

*Can Low-Income Customers Benefit from Advanced Metering, Load Control and Real Time Pricing Strategies?* This session explored the use of advanced metering, load control and real time pricing strategies for low-income residential customers. Panelists: Jack Woolams/Energy Investment Systems, Michael Bobker/Association for Energy Affordability, and Ed Morrison/New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (Moderator).

## Energy Markets

*Choice and Change: Responding to a Changing Market.* Panelists: Roberta Scerbo/Orange and Rockland, Norma Dunkelberger/1<sup>st</sup> Rochdale, and Martin Insogna/New York State Department of Public Service (Moderator).

*Understanding an Era of Volatile Pricing and What It Means for Low-Income Households.* Panelists: Jim Tarantino/New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, Jonathan Gruchala/National Fuel Gas Company, Raj Addepalli/New York State Department of Public Service

## Next Steps For LIFE

The LIFE Steering Committee has proposed the following activities for 2005-2006:

- Regional Meetings in the summer to bring together the LIFE stakeholders to discuss regional and statewide energy policy issues which impact low-income consumers
- Development of the Fifth Statewide LIFE Conference in the Spring of 2006
- Continued development of the LIFE website (<http://www.lifenynews.org>)

## For More Information

If you would like to receive information about any of the upcoming LIFE activities or for more information about the LIFE 2004 Statewide Conference, please contact: Martin Insogna, Chairman/LIFE Steering Committee at [Martin\\_Insogna@dps.state.ny.us](mailto:Martin_Insogna@dps.state.ny.us) or 518/486-2493, Peggie Neville, NYSERDA's Project Manager at [man@nyserda.org](mailto:man@nyserda.org) or 518/862-1090 extension 3368, or Sue Montgomery Corey, LIFE Manager at [suemc@capital.net](mailto:suemc@capital.net) or 518/251-2525.

## LIFE 2004 Attendance

Sector	Number Attending	Percent of Total
Utility	24	16.90%
Federal Government	1	.70%
State Government	45	31.69%
Local Government	25	17.61%
14 Dept. of Social Services		
6 Office for Aging		
5 Other Local Government		
Community		
Action/Weatherization	17	11.97%
Community-Based		
Organization	15	10.56%
Energy Services Company	4	2.82%
Faith-Based	1	.70%
Independent Living Centers	0	0%
Statewide Non-Profit	5	3.52%
National Non-Profit	0	0%
Other	5	3.52%

County	Number Attending	Percent of Total
Albany	48	33.80%
Bronx	3	2.11%
Broome	4	2.82%
Cattaraugus	1	.70%
Cayuga	1	.70%
Chautauqua	2	1.41%
Chemung	1	.70%
Clinton	2	1.41%
Cortland	1	.70%
Dutchess	3	2.11%
Erie	4	2.82%
Essex	4	2.82%
Franklin	2	1.41%
Fulton	1	.70%
Kings	5	3.52%
Livingston	1	.70%
Madison	2	1.41%
Monroe	4	2.82%
Montgomery	1	.70%
Nassau	4	2.82%
New York	14	9.86%
Onondaga	7	4.93%
Ontario	1	.70%
Otsego	2	1.41%
Out of State	5	3.52%
Queens	3	2.11%
Rensselaer	1	.70%
Rockland	2	1.41%
Saratoga	1	.70%
Schenectady	2	1.41%
St.	2	1.41%
Lawrence	1	.70%
Steuben	1	.70%
Tioga	3	2.11%
Warren	2	1.41%
Washington	1	.70%
Westchester		

## **Organizations Registered For LIFE 2004 Statewide Conference**

1<sup>st</sup> Rochdale Cooperative

Albany County Dept. of Social Services

American Red Cross of Cortland County

Association for Energy Affordability

Boro Park Jewish Community Council

Cattaraugus Community Action

Cayuga County Health & Human Services

Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corp.

Chautauqua Home Rehabilitation &  
Improvement Corp. (CHRIC)

Chemung County Dept. of Social Services

Commission on Economic Opportunity

Community Action Program for Madison County

Community Energy Services Inc.

Community Power Network of NYS Inc.

Con Edison of New York Inc.

Cornell Cooperative Ext. of Washington County

Corporation for Youth Energy Corps.

Democracy and Regulation

Dutchess County Community Action Agency

Dutchess County Office for the Aging

Energy Investment Systems Inc.

Essex County Dept. of Social Services

Essex County Dept. of Social Services

Fisher Sheehan & Colton

Franklin County Dept. of Social Services

Franklin County Office for the Aging

Governor's Office for Small Cities

Habitat for Humanity- NYC

HeartShare Human Services of New York

Honeywell Utility Solutions

Housing Conservation Coordinators Inc .

JCEO of Clinton & Franklin Counties Inc.

KeySpan Energy Delivery

Livingston County Dept. of Social Services

Long Island Power Authority (LIPA)

Madison County Dept. of Social Services

Margert Community Corporation

Monroe County Dept. of Social Services

Montgomery County Office for the Aging

National Energy Marketers Association

National Fuel Funds Network

Neighborhood Legal Services

Niagara Mohawk A National Grid Company

North Country Ministry

NYC Dept. for the Aging- WRAP

NYS Consumer Protection Board

NYS Dept. of Public Service

NYS Div. of Housing & Community Renewal

NYS Electric & Gas

NYS Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA)

NYS Office for the Aging

NYS Office of Temporary & Disability Assistance

NYS Senate

NYS Weatherization Directors Association (NYSWDA)

Office of the Lieutenant Governor

Onondaga County Dept. of Social Services

Ontario County Dept. of Social Services

Opportunities for Broome Inc.

Orange & Rockland Utilities Inc.

Public Utility Law Project

Rochester Gas & Electric Co.

Saratoga County Dept. of Social Services

Schenectady Community Action Program

Schenectady County Office for the Aging

Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy

So. Bronx Overall Economic Development Corp.)

St. Lawrence County Community Development Program

State Emergency Management Office

Steuben County Dept. of Social Services

Sullivan County Dept. of Family Services

Tioga County Dept. of Social Services

U.S. Department of HUD

United Tenants of Albany

USDA Rural Development

Warren County Dept. of Social Services

Washington County Office for the Aging

Westchester County Dept. of Social Services