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To: Prosper, Terrie D. (terrie.prosper@cpuc.ca.gov)
Cc:
Bcc:
Subject: CPUC Launches Program to Assist Limited English Speaking Consumers with Energy Issues: CPUC Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE

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**CPUC LAUNCHES PROGRAM TO ASSIST
LIMITED ENGLISH SPEAKING CONSUMERS
WITH ENERGY ISSUES**

SAN FRANCISCO,
Jan. 27, 2011 - The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) today launched a pilot program to provide outreach, education, and dispute and needs resolution assistance on energy matters for consumers who speak little or no English (referred to as Limited English Proficient, or LEP) through a statewide network of Community Based Organizations (CBOs).

The

program, referred to as Community Help and Awareness of Natural Gas and Electricity Services (CHANGES), is supported by Pacific Gas and Electric Company, Southern California Edison, San Diego Gas & Electric, and Southern California Gas Company and funded at \$500,000 through the utilities' California Alternate Rates for Energy (CARE) funds.

Although the program is targeted for LEP consumers, statistics from another LEP targeted program show that more than 80 percent of the consumers helped have income levels low enough to qualify for CARE. California law and CPUC decisions specify that seniors and CARE-eligible consumers should receive the type of information that CHANGES will provide.

The CBOs

will provide consumer assistance in the language of the consumer's choosing from the more than 18 non-English languages available through the program. The CBOs will educate consumers on assistance programs, how to read energy bills, understanding energy baseline and the tiered rate structure, how to avoid service disconnection, energy conservation, and safety. The CBOs will assist consumers with their utility needs and disputes, such as setting up payment arrangements, getting service established or re-established, and looking into high bill or disputed bill complaints.

The

pilot program will be administered by Self-Help for the Elderly, the same contractor who administers the CPUC's Telecommunications Education and Assistance in Multiple-languages (TEAM) program. Since the beginning of the TEAM program the CPUC has heard from CBOs that the same consumers who turn to them for assistance with their phone bills also bring their energy bills to them for assistance. TEAM was created as part of the CPUC's efforts to assist LEP consumers to understand the many choices in the ever changing telecommunications marketplace and to protect them from fraud or hard sales tactics, which they are especially vulnerable to because of their language challenge. Six million or 20 percent of all Californians are LEP, according to recent U.S. Census findings.

CHANGES

and TEAM help LEP consumers by utilizing organizations that consumers are already familiar with and trust. By the end of the year, the CPUC will determine whether to continue the program, its funding level, and method of funding. The CPUC will also evaluate the effectiveness of providing both programs through the same contractor and CBO network.

For more information on the CPUC, please visit www.cpuc.ca.gov.

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