

August 24, 2009

Utilities & Transportation Commission
P.O. Box 47250
Olympia WA 98504

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FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT
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STATE OF WASH.
UTIL. AND TRANSP.
COMMISSION

Dear UTC Staff:

With regard to **Avista Utilities** and **docket #UE-090134/UE-090135**, I write today in my capacity with Catholic Charities Spokane, fielding many calls each week from Avista Utilities customers in need of assistance to meet basic needs. In recent months, we have noticed a substantial increase in the number of requests for help avoiding utility disconnect or restoring services after a disconnect. Some of these customers are still struggling with charges accrued during the particularly harsh winter of 2008-09. The assistance available from the private sector (charitable agencies and faith communities) has declined just as demand has increased and there are fewer and fewer resources in the community for low-income families to approach for help.

I urge the Utilities & Transportation Commission, as recommended by the Public Counsel section of the State Attorney General's office, to **require Avista Utilities to maintain programs that assist low-income residents on a par with any rate increases at the very least**, and even to increase that assistance overall in order to reach more households.

Our typical clients for emergency financial assistance are families with young children, often headed by a single parent. Reflecting the national economic situation, many are relying on Unemployment Insurance for survival. And this is not simply a matter of keeping the lights on. For some households, losing utility services can endanger access to housing services, meaning that keeping the lights on also means having a place to live. Another way to say this is that more assistance for utilities means less homelessness and profound family disruption.

Once again, I ask that the Utilities & Transportation Commission to follow the recommendations of the Public Counsel section of the State Attorney General and require Avista Utilities to maintain and increase programs that help low-income households in Eastern Washington.

Sincerely,



Scott Cooper
Director, Parish Social Ministries

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