

**Ministry of Energy,
Northern Development
and Mines**

Office of the Minister

Office of the Associate Minister
of Energy

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**Ministère de l'Énergie,
du Développement du Nord
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August 4, 2020

Mr. Robert Dodds
Vice-Chair
Ontario Energy Board
Robert.Dodds@oeb.ca

Dear Mr. Dodds:

Our government continues to implement our COVID-19 Action Plan to help stop and contain the spread of COVID-19 while providing support for those adversely affected by this emergency.

We appreciate the leadership that both the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) and Ontario's regulated utilities have demonstrated during this time, including most recently in facilitating the launch of the COVID-19 Energy Assistance Program (CEAP) for residential customers. As we indicated in our letter of June 1, the government also recognizes the need to help small businesses who have fallen behind on their energy bills as a result of COVID-19. That is why in addition to the \$9 million the government has committed through CEAP, we are allocating a further \$8 million to assist small businesses and charities through the COVID-19 Energy Assistance Program – Small Business (CEAP-SB).

We request the OEB's support to implement CEAP-SB and act as the OEB determines necessary to ensure that licensed electricity distributors, unit sub-meter providers, and natural gas distributors provide the program to their eligible low-volume small business and registered charity customers.

As the OEB considers the implementation of CEAP-SB, we ask the OEB to consider the following, which we believe will help the \$8 million reach those who need it the most:

- Make CEAP-SB available to small businesses and registered charities that meet both the following criteria:

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- 1) the customer has fallen behind by at least two billing cycles, but their accounts were in good standing when the provincial emergency was declared; and
 - 2) the customer was required to close for at least fifteen days as a result of a government order or an inability to adapt their business to comply with COVID-19-related public health recommendations;
- Provide electricity customers with up to \$850 in support if they primarily use electricity for heating, and up to \$425 otherwise;
 - Provide natural gas customers with up to \$425 in support;
 - Provide support in respect of only a single location for a small business or registered charity, as determined by the registered business number or charitable registration number; and
 - Allocate the \$8 million in support across all electricity and natural gas distributors and unit sub-metering providers.

We note that the OEB's ban on low volume electricity disconnections ends on July 31, 2020. We expect that CEAP-SB will allow many customers who would otherwise face disconnection to catch up on their arrears and thereby avoid disconnection. We understand that due to the steps necessary to implement CEAP-SB, it is possible that under the OEB's customer service rules, customers could face disconnection between July 31 and the launch of the application window for CEAP-SB. We hope that customers will be able to apply for CEAP-SB before the end of August, and we ask that the OEB encourage distributors and unit sub-meter providers to allow customers to apply to CEAP-SB before disconnections occur.

To support CEAP-SB, the Ministry intends to enter into a transfer payment agreement with the Independent Electricity System Operator, and with natural gas companies, to reimburse regulated electricity and unit sub-meter providers. The Ministry remains ready to support the OEB in its development and implementation of CEAP-SB and its administration of CEAP.

We would like to thank the OEB for its efforts during the COVID-19 emergency, and look forward to our continued work together to support customers as Ontario gradually reopens the economy.

Sincerely,



The Honourable Greg Rickford
Minister of Energy, Northern
Development and Mines



The Honourable Bill Walker
Associate Minister of Energy