



# NEW JERSEY

## DIVISION

### OF THE RATEPAYER ADVOCATE

*UNIVERSAL SERVICE*  
*Making Energy Bills Affordable*

#### UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUND

When the New Jersey Legislature passed the Electric Discount and Energy Competition Act of 1999, it called for the creation of a **Universal Service Fund** to provide affordable electric and gas service for state residents.

#### RATEPAYER ADVOCATE REPRESENTS CONSUMERS

The Board of Public Utilities recently began its formal decision making process about the creation of such a fund. The Ratepayer Advocate will represent consumers at upcoming **public hearings** to ensure that the Fund will provide all of the state's low-income consumers with the opportunity to obtain and maintain quality utility service at affordable prices.

#### ASSISTANCE FOR PEOPLE IN NEED

Over 1.4 million people in New Jersey live with incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Low-income consumers should receive a credit based on a sliding scale, depending on household income. A **crisis intervention fund**, coordinated with existing emergency benefits, should also be provided for **all consumers**.

#### WIN-WIN SITUATION FOR ALL RATEPAYERS

A Universal Service Fund is also a **good business investment**. Utilities spend millions of dollars each year in attempts to collect overdue bills from households that do not have the resources to pay them. Even when a utility does collect a bill from a low-income household, the utility often has spent considerable sums in the process of collection. The costs of payment problems are reflected in everyone's utilities rates. Universal Service programs in other states have **greatly reduced** utilities' collection costs.

#### WE URGE YOUR PARTICIPATION

The Ratepayer Advocate urges residents, public officials, and social service organizations representing citizens in need, to attend and testify in favor of a **Universal Service Fund** at one of the upcoming public hearings: **August 21 at 9 a.m.** in the Hearing Room at the **Board of Public Utilities** at Two Gateway Center in Newark.

**August 22 at 7 p.m.** in the Courtroom at the **Jamesburg Municipal Building** at 131 Perrineville Road in Jamesburg.

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