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## **GROWING SUPPORT OF LOCAL UTILITIES FOR THE WINTER WARMTH PROGRAM HELPS MORE ONTARIO FAMILIES STAY WARM THIS WINTER**

*More than 3,600 families will receive funding & benefit from the Winter Warmth program this year*

**Toronto, ON December 1, 2009 – Continuing its work to help Ontario households stay out of the cold this winter, the United Way and its local utility partners today launched the 2009-2010 Winter Warmth program.**

**This year's campaign will see increased support from participating local utilities including Burlington Hydro, Enbridge Gas Distribution, Enersource Hydro Mississauga, Horizon Utilities, Hydro One, Hydro Ottawa, PowerStream, Toronto Hydro-Electric System Ltd., Union Gas Limited and Veridian Connections Inc..**

"We're thrilled by the increased support for the Winter Warmth program across Ontario," said Manny Sousa, Chair of the Winter Warmth Provincial Steering Committee. "The increase in participation means that Winter Warmth will be able to reach even more families and individuals in need this winter and underlines the important role this program plays in communities across the province."

Winter Warmth is an initiative that helps financially struggling families and individuals pay their energy bills during the cold winter months. The program is coordinated by the United Way through a network of more than 60 community agencies and is funded by participating utility companies.

The 2008/2009 Winter Warmth program provided energy assistance grants totaling more than \$1.2 million to 3,400 eligible households. This was a 34% increase from the previous year. Total funds available for the 2009/2010 program are estimated to be more than \$1.5 million. Since the program's launch in 2004, more than 9,000 Ontario households have received assistance.

### **How does Winter Warmth work?**

Ontario families and individuals in need of financial assistance to pay their heating and electricity bills can learn more about the Winter Warmth program from their local utility.

Utilities participating in the Winter Warmth program include:

Burlington Hydro, Enbridge Gas Distribution, Enersource Hydro Mississauga, Horizon Utilities, Hydro One, Hydro Ottawa, PowerStream, Toronto Hydro-Electric System Ltd., Union Gas Limited and Veridian Connections Inc.

Call centres at participating utilities will also advise customers about how to apply for Winter Warmth funding and direct them to the appropriate agency.

After successful completion of the application process, funding will be credited directly to the applicant's utility bill.

### **Who is eligible?**

Eligible grant recipients include Ontario households that cannot pay their current energy bill due to reduced income levels or extenuating circumstances, are in arrears or at risk of going into arrears, have recently received a disconnection notice and have exhausted all other sources of financial support.

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### **Media Contacts**

Jennifer Smith  
Vice-President, Corporate Relations  
**Burlington Hydro**  
Tel: (905) 332-2340

Michelle Pennell  
Senior Communications Specialist  
**Enersource Corporation**  
Tel: (905) 283-4295

Daniele Gauvin  
Senior Media Relations Officer  
**Hydro One**  
Tel: (877) 506-7584

Debbie Conte  
Corporate Communications Specialist  
**PowerStream Inc.**  
Tel: (905) 532-4528

Andrea Stass  
Media Relations Manager  
**Union Gas Limited**  
Tel: (519) 436-5490

Gary L. Vipond  
Chief Executive Officer  
**United Way of Sault Ste. Marie**  
Tel: (705) 256-7476 ext. 201

Debbie Boukydis  
Director, Public & Government Affairs  
**Enbridge Gas Distribution Inc.**  
Tel: (416) 495-5682

Sandy Manners  
Director, Corporate Communications  
**Horizon Utilities Corporation**  
Tel: (905) 317-4707

Rosemary Walsh  
Manager, Communications & Public Affairs  
**Hydro Ottawa Limited**  
Tel: (613) 221-0063

Paul Reesor  
Communications Consultant  
Community Involvement, Events &  
Sponsorship  
**Toronto Hydro-Electric System Ltd.**  
Tel: (416) 542-3043

George Armstrong  
Manager  
Regulatory Affairs and Key Projects  
**Veridian Connections Inc.**  
Tel : (905) 427-9870 ext. 2202