

Minister of Energy

Office of the Minister

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MC-2017-306

February 16, 2017

Ms Lisa Milne
President and CEO
Westario Power Inc.
24 Eastridge Road
RR 2
Walkerton ON N0G 2V0

Ms Milne:

Over the last decade, our province has made significant investments and transformed our electricity system. We have rebuilt transmission and distribution lines, expanded our generation capacity, and moved away from dirty coal-fired electricity.

The transformation of our system was for the better, but it has come at a cost that presents a challenge to many Ontarians. Local distributors know this well – interacting directly with customers in your communities across the province, helping to ensure reliable access to clean, affordable electricity for all.

I am proud of the work we have done together to advance this mission. Working together, we have implemented enhanced customer protection rules followed by all Local Distribution Companies, including:

- Requiring a minimum 10 days advance notice of disconnection;
- Accompanying any notice with resources to help customers with their arrears;
- And providing all customers with the option of a payment plan to meet their monthly bills.

We also have developed many programs to specifically assist low-income customers, including the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP), which provides emergency financial support and special, more flexible customer service rules. Taken together, the industry's programs and services represent our ongoing collective commitment to helping customers who are struggling with their bills.

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As you know, our government has been concerned with the threat of disconnection faced by some families in need in our province, especially during the winter months. In legislation currently working its way through the Legislative Assembly, we have sought to empower the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) to have expanded authority over the rules it sets around disconnections, enhancing protections for these customers. We hope to see Bill 27 – The Burden Reduction Act – passed quickly by the legislature, in order that the OEB can begin the important work of strengthening the rules used to protect consumers.

In the meantime, I want to ask all LDCs to assist the government in expanding protection to vulnerable customers by immediately and voluntarily implementing a policy of ending residential disconnections during the winter months. At no point, under any circumstances, should a customer be put at risk over their electricity bill. Many distributors have already adopted policies or standards to exactly this effect and I commend the utilities that have taken leadership in this regard. As we await passage of The Burden Reduction Act, all LDC's should commit to this high standard.

Thank you for the important work you do for your customers and for all Ontarians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Thibeault', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Glenn Thibeault
Minister