

Help! I need to pay my Hydro bill

In November, Ontarians were notified that Hydro rates were on the rise. Customers saw an increase to 17.5 cents a kilowatt hour during peak times, 12.8 cents a kilowatt hour during mid-peak hours and 8.3 cents a kilowatt hour during off-peak hours. Now, just two short months later, there will be more changes to your Hydro bill, effective January 1st. The changes will once again increase the cost of Hydro, raising the average residential Hydro bill in Ontario approximately \$100 per year. With the cold weather upon us and more increases to come, there seems to be no end in sight to skyrocketing Hydro rates in Ontario.

Distribution rates are also on the rise beginning in February, with an increase of .4 per cent on the average residential bill. In addition, once approved, the Ontario Energy Board will be making changes to distribution rates that will result in an increase of .7 per cent on Hydro bills. The Clean Energy Benefit which provided a 10 per cent reduction on residential Hydro bills was removed at the end of 2015, and that alone will increase the average bill by \$12 per month.

Hydro customers will now see a line on their bill called the Ontario Electricity Support Program. It's a new program that provides a discount up to \$50 per month to qualifying low-income households who apply. To pay for this program, other Hydro customers who do not qualify as a low-income household will pay an additional \$11.16 annually. While the government continues to boast about this program as their way of helping low income families - only seven per cent of eligible households have applied for the Ontario Electricity Support Program.

If you are in arrears or having trouble paying your Hydro bill, please consider applying for the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP). LEAP is a one-time grant that will cover up to \$500 of the amount owing on your natural gas bill. If your home is electrically heated, it will cover up to \$600 of the amount owing. To be eligible for this program, you must have a qualifying household income. For more information on LEAP, please visit www.ontarioenergyboard.ca or call my office at 1-800-265-1603 for assistance.

Since 2004 Hydro rates have increased from 6.5 cents per kilowatt hour to a current 17.5 cents per kilowatt hour at peak times. In comparison, residents of Quebec pay on average 7.31 cents per kilowatt hour, New Brunswick residents pay on average 13.19 cents per kilowatt hour and Newfoundland residents pay on average 12.48 cents per kilowatt hour. Ontarians deserve to have a reasonable and reliable source of Hydro, instead of the current ballooning rates they are paying for.

If you oppose the government's mismanagement of the energy sector, please visit my website at www.sylviajones.ca to sign my petition calling on the government to ensure families, farmers, and businesses across Ontario have affordable and reliable electricity.

By Sylvia Jones, MPP