

Minister's Bullets for Sudbury Event

re: Disconnections

- Now I'd like to take a moment to speak about a very timely issue with respect to families in Ontario that are struggling to pay their electricity bills.
- When I was appointed Minister of Energy, the Premier made it clear to me that my top priority was to find a way help lower the cost of electricity for everybody in the province.
- And to that end, in September our government introduced an 8% rebate on bills while increasing the assistance provided to rural customers who face higher delivery charges. These benefits kicked in on January 1st of this year, and will provide a savings of \$11 per month for the average household across Ontario, in addition to a credit of \$60.50 for 330,000 rural customers who face the highest delivery charges.
- At the same time, our government knows we need to do more to continue to lower costs for Ontario families, and since the introduction of the 8% rebate I have been working tirelessly towards implementing a new round of initiatives to help ease the burden on Ontarians.
- We are committed to introducing new relief measures in advance of our government's spring Budget.
- But these are big decisions and, as a government, we want to make sure we get this right, to ensure that families will see these benefits on their bills as soon as possible.
- In the meantime, our government has been concerned with the threat of disconnection faced by some families in need in our province, especially during the winter months.
- Personally, as a former Executive Director of United Way Sudbury, I know how difficult it can be for families and individuals who are having a hard time dealing with unpaid bills of all types, whether electricity or otherwise

- And the last thing that myself and our government want is to see folks who are having a hard time paying their bills face the threat of having their power turned off.

- That's why our government has introduced Bill 27, the *Burden Reduction Act*, in order to give the Ontario Energy Board the authority to prohibit disconnections during certain periods.

- And I would strongly and sincerely call on the members of the opposition and third parties to **help us get Bill 27 passed as soon as possible**, so that we can empower the Ontario Energy Board to be more stringent in the rules it sets around disconnections, enhancing protection for these customers.

- In fact, I have written to the opposition to ask them for their support for timely passage of the bill, and hope that they will help get us this important measure in place as quickly as we can.

- If the opposition continues to stall the timely passage of Bill 27, the government is **prepared to take action to ensure we get these rules in place as soon as possible**.

- At the same time, we know that many of Ontario's distribution utilities have already followed our government's lead and adopted a policy of ending disconnections during the winter months.

- Hydro One, which serves roughly 27% of all customers in Ontario, has not only ended winter disconnections under their "Winter Relief Program", but has proactively reconnected customers whose service had been previously disconnected.

- And today, I am asking those LDCs who have not already adopted a similar program to assist the government in expanding protection to vulnerable customers by immediately and voluntarily implementing a policy of ending disconnections during the winter months.

- At no point, under any circumstances, should a customer be put at risk over their electricity bill. As we await the passage of the *Burden Reduction Act*, all LDCs should commit to this high standard.