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Carmen D. Diaz  
Acting Secretary of the Board  
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To Whom It May Concern:

The AHA has been a long-time dedicated partner of the BPU, assisting clients access services under USF, LIHEAP, and PAGE. As such, the AHA feels that it is vitally important to provide commentary, as a non-profit organization, about its stance on the questions being posed by the BPU.

In regards to the USF income ceiling, the AHA would like to propose that the guidelines be in alignment with the federal LIHEAP program. This request comes from the experiences the AHA staff has when working with clients, assisting them in navigating the system in place. In its current structure, the AHA has to explain the intricacies of each program and explain how a client may be eligible for one program and not another, based on the differences in income ceilings and the eligibility requirements. At times, this can be confusing and complicated for clients and it results in the staff spending additional time on communicating those differences when time could be more effectively spent on working on applications and assisting the clients in accessing the services.

Additionally, the AHA supports the BPU in reverting back to the \$150 monthly benefit cap. While the additional support has been beneficial as individuals and families navigated through the pandemic, the AHA does recognize that things are “going back to normal” and thus original, more sustainable rates need to be re-established.

In regards to the Fresh Start program, the AHA has seen an incredible increase in Fresh Start Forgiveness of over 1200%. As the severity of the pandemic has weakened our agency also has seen delinquent utility bills of unprecedented amounts. Assistance programs are there to *assist* clients and people in hardship, not to assume full payment of their bills. So while Fresh Start, as the name indicates, should provide relief to those in hardship, AHA supports the idea of Fresh Start enrollment only once in every five years.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Randi Moore', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Randi Moore, CEO

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