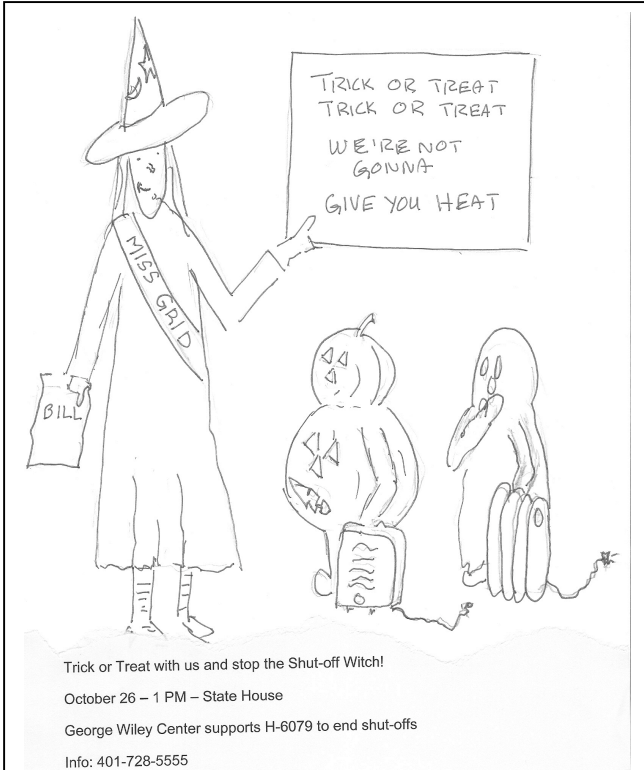


Updated Mission: *The George Wiley Center is a statewide group actively committed to local community organizing for the purpose of creating social and economic justice through changes in public policy.*



Time to Change the Shut-off Rules!

The George Wiley Center members were reminded that the purpose of the Public Utilities Commission is to “implement and enforce the standards of conduct” on behalf of utility customers. Instead of a “hardship moratorium,” the PUC decided to review the rules which penalize those least able to pay. George Wiley Center associates Julie Silvia and Board member Robert McConnell, Esq. will represent low-income consumers on the “Negotiated Rule Making Committee” established under Docket No. 4098.

The Division of Public Utilities is responsible for implementing the PUC termination rules. Division employees act as judges at customer hearings to resolve payment plan problems between National Grid. Division “judges” typically reduce the “problem” to one of a growth in “uncollectibles.” Human horror stories from elderly and sick abound. Clear and humane rules could put teeth into the Swiss-cheese-like protections currently in place for the “seriously ill.” Let’s keep up the heat!

Fight for Fair Utility Bills via Legislation (H-6079) continues....

Here’s a brief on what’s been happening:

- Will the Rhode Island General Assembly return to session on October 28th? In the absence of a crystal ball, we continue to assume so. The House Finance Committee could consider H-6079 sponsored by Rep. Art Handy and recommend speedy passage. The RI Senate could rush through the companion affordable energy bill on their side (S-0490 sponsored by Sen. Josh Miller). That would be fair. It is much *better for all of us* if those living at 150% of poverty and below could pay an affordable amount every month for their heat. Currently, there is a crisis of disconnections because they can’t afford to pay what is required. The status quo is a moral outrage and public health risk!
- PUC Docket 4065- National Grid is requesting an 11.2% hike (over \$20 per month on average per customer) in order to secure their share of the electric market in RI and the Public Utilities Commission has yet to rule. With the poor state of the economy and the crisis in provision of service to a significant portion of the state’s population, this is an ill-timed, and ill-conceived, rate request.
- Recently the PUC ruled to allow 10%, 15% and 20% down-payments on past due bills for customers without utility service for heat. While reported as a total loss of our request for 10% down, this was a hard-fought for gain by George Wiley Center members last year. The standard rules call for 60% and 100% payment of back balances for those customers on fixed low-incomes who cannot afford minimal utilities. (pg 41, [http://www.ripuc.org/rulesregs/commrules/termination-rules\(9-22-08\).pdf](http://www.ripuc.org/rulesregs/commrules/termination-rules(9-22-08).pdf))
- On July 15, 2009, Members and supporters of the George Wiley Center gathered at the Public Utilities Commission for a 9 AM meeting to review a request for a “Hardship Moratorium” to help unemployed RIers. The request was denied in a few minutes, BUT the PUC decided to review its own rules. (See article on left.)



The **George Wiley Center** will hold its 8th annual fundraiser on Wednesday, October 28th at the Pawtucket Armory Center for the Arts, from 6:00 – 9:00 PM. *If you think Halloween is SCARY, imagine having your heat shut off!* Costumes and/or masks are optional at this event which features a silent auction with many items from Rhode Island retailers & crafters, musical entertainment by Celtic folk artist Phil Edmonds, a dinner buffet catered by More Than a Meal and a cash bar.

Juggling bills to buy food and keep the electricity and heat on is a struggle for too many Rhode Island households. “Thousands of households in this state are penalized for having low-incomes. They are forced to live without lights, refrigeration, heat and the means to cook a meal. This can change if we have enough support,” states Henry Shelton, Coordinator and founder of the George Wiley Center.

The event benefits community organizing to end hunger and utility shut-offs. It is underwritten by **Citizens Bank**, sponsored by **MetLife Auto & Home** with assistance from **Cavanagh Company**, **Lifespan Diversity Office**, **UFCWU Local 328**, **University of Rhode Island** and the following Community Friends: **Hon. J. Clement Cicilline**, **John J. & Suzanne M. Colby**, **Johnson & Wales University, U.S. Congressman Patrick Kennedy**, **B. Jean Rosiello**, Attorney at Law and **Don Tufts & Sue Ross**.

Event admission is \$50, with reservations encouraged. The event benefits community organizing to end hunger and utility shut-offs. To pay for event admission or for more information, visit www.georgewileycenter.org or call 401-728-5555.

Thank you to our 2009 grant supporters!

Bank Rhode Island – Unemployed workers project

Bristol County Savings Charitable Foundation, Inc. – Anti-Hunger project

Hassenfeld Family Initiative – Affordable Energy

Rhode Island Council on the Humanities – George Wiley Legacy Project

Rhode Island Foundation – LIHEAP & Organize to Weatherize!