

MANSO MANITOBA ASSOCIATION
OF NEWCOMER SERVING
ORGANIZATIONS

May 10, 2023

To: Public Utilities Board

Re: Manitoba Hydro Rate Hearing

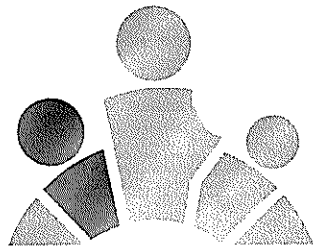
We are the Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organization (MANSO) housing committee, and our committee members work at agencies from across the province that support newcomers to Manitoba as they make Manitoba their new home. The MANSO housing committee works together to inform the over 70 MANSO member agencies and the public about housing issues faced by newcomers and to reduce barriers that newcomers face when it comes to accessing housing that they can afford and maintain.

We are writing you this letter to express our concerns over the request by Manitoba Hydro to increase electricity rates for residential customers by 4.8% by April 2024. Increases in Hydro costs will directly impact households that are low income, and they will face much harsher realities than households with higher incomes. When newcomers arrive, they are most often low income for the first years of their settlement journey. According to Stats Canada, “poverty was more prevalent among immigrants than among the Canadian-born population, particularly among refugees and recent immigrants”. They are either on fixed incomes like Employment and Income Assistance or they are working minimum wage jobs. Monthly budgets are incredibly tight as it is, and high Hydro bills are not helping.

We’ve heard from families that must choose between paying rent and paying their Hydro bills – they cannot afford to pay both in one month. This puts them at risk of eviction and homelessness. We’ve worked with families that need to access the Manitoba Rent Relief loan in order to pay for rental arrears or Hydro arrears as they cannot keep up with both monthly payments.

There are 3 main concerns that we have when it comes to Hydro costs and newcomers. Newcomers have larger family sizes and rent older/poorly insulated homes; newcomers have less supports when starting new Hydro accounts and issues navigating deposits; and newcomers are one of the groups that would benefit from a return to in-person customer services at MB Hydro.

1. Newcomer families are often larger in size, and they require rental properties with 3 or more bedrooms. These homes are often of older construction, with old windows and poor insulation. This means that their Hydro bills are much more expensive compared to other house holds, living in newer and well-maintained homes. We’ve heard from families that are paying \$400-\$700/month



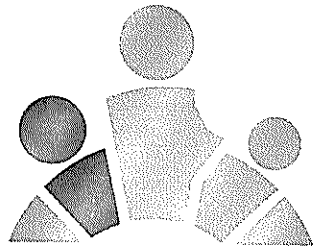
MANSO

MANITOBA ASSOCIATION
OF NEWCOMER SERVING
ORGANIZATIONS

just to keep the heat on in their home. Landlords of these properties have little incentive to make these properties more energy efficient as they are not the ones carrying these utilities costs.

2. Newcomers are one of the main groups of Manitoba residents that activate MB Hydro accounts for the first time. We understand that MB Hydro requires a deposit for first time accounts but there is a pathway to get this deposit waived if someone is struggling financially. The process is not widely promoted and is often only used when a community worker/advocate is connected to the family, and able to inform them. This leaves people out who do not know about this option. This also puts more work on community nonprofits that have to advocate with MB Hydro on their client's behalf.
3. Another concern we have over the rate increase is the fact that Hydro has cut costs over the past few years by closing in-person customer services and shifting to online services. Online services are great for some, but they will always leave some people out. Those without internet access and those lacking computer literacy skills are struggling to navigate MB Hydro's services. The only way to set up a new Hydro account is either online or over the phone. For a newcomer that does not have computer access and cannot communicate in English or French, they are left with no options. Our hope is that Manitoba Hydro opens a customer service office where anyone can go to receive support to set up accounts, ask questions and pay bills. When services shift online, those without online access will either go without or they will come to community agencies to get support. Nonprofits are already working beyond capacity and with limited resources. When our staff have to spend an hour on hold with Hydro or have multiple appointments with clients to set up online Hydro accounts, this puts a strain on our resources. We do not believe that MB Hydro should be cutting their services and then pushing the work onto the nonprofit sector.

We are very concerned about MB Hydro's request to increase rates yet again. When MB Hydro has made record profits over the past years, what is the justification to keep increasing rates for consumers? Those that live in Manitoba have no choice but to pay for Hydro as we cannot survive without heat and electricity – but it is the job of the PUB to hold MB Hydro accountable and to truly consider the impacts of what higher rates will have on the community.



MANSO

MANITOBA ASSOCIATION
OF NEWCOMER SERVING
ORGANIZATIONS

Thank you for your time and considering our letter as the PUB gathers information for this Hydro rate increase.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Codi Guenther', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Codi Guenther

Chair of MANSO Housing committee

codig@newjourneyhousing.com

204-942-2238

