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DOCKET NO. 12897

IN RE: UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUND ("USF") GRANT PROGRAM TO ASSIST LOW-INCOME SENIOR CITIZENS AND OTHER LOW-INCOME CITIZENS

FINAL ORDER APPROVING HOPEWORKS PETITION FOR UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUND EMERGENCY HEATING ASSISTANCE YEARS 2025-2029

I. Background

At its Administrative Session on October 2, 2001, the Georgia Public Service Commission ("Commission") created a grant program to assist low-income seniors. The Commission found that such a program was necessary because a large number of low-income senior citizens were having difficulty being able to afford replacing their gas furnaces and gas water heaters and paying their natural gas bills. Many such customers were disconnected from natural gas service for unpaid bills and because of gas units that were no longer operable. The Commission is authorized to use funds from the USF in order to assist low-income residential consumers in times of emergency. O.C.G.A. § 46-4-161(a)(3). The General Assembly left the determination of "emergency" to the Commission's discretion. Id.

II. HopeWorks Petition Overview

On June 27, 2024, HopeWorks filed for USF funding for their HopeWorks Emergency Low-income Program for Seniors ("HELPS" or "Program") program to request Emergency Heating Assistance for low-income Georgians who are customers of Atlanta Gas Light Company ("AGLC") and the Georgia Deregulated Natural Gas Marketers ("Gas Marketer(s)"). The petition discussed the following:

A. HELPS Program Background

B. HopeWorks Accomplishments
C. HELPS Program Scope per the Petition
D. HELPS Target Outcomes per the Petition
E. HELPS Monthly Reporting
F. HopeWorks Requests for 2025 – 2029

The Helps program provides funding in support of the repair or replacement of natural gas furnaces, natural gas space heaters, and natural gas water heaters ("Gas Appliances")

A. HELPS Program Background

During the November 1, 2011, Administrative Session, the Commission approved the Emergency Gas Heater and Gas Water Heater Repair and Replacement Program for Low-Income Senior Citizens ("Emergency Program") now HELPS. The Emergency Program served low-income senior citizen homeowners, in times of emergency that are in AGLC's territory and served by a Gas Marketer. The purpose of the program is to provide the repair or replacement of natural gas furnaces and gas water heaters for low-income senior citizens. The Emergency Program was led by HopeWorks, formerly Resource Service Ministries ("RSM"). During that time, the annual household limit on USF assistance was $5,000. The Emergency Program originally had as many as seven different participating agencies. In the September 28, 2016 Final Order in Docket No. 12897, the Commission approved reducing the number of the participating agencies to one, HopeWorks, to achieve greater efficiency within the program. The program was also renamed at that time to the HELPS program. In the Commission's Final Order in Docket No. 12897 approved on July 22, 2019, the Commission approved $401,224 for 2020 and $700,000 a year for 2021-2024, or $3.2 million, an increase to the household limit from $5,000 to $6,000, and approval of the HopeWorks Scope, Target Outcomes, and reporting. As of the June 2024 Report, HopeWorks had $359,341 remaining.

B. HopeWorks Accomplishments

HopeWorks stated that over the past 13 years, the HELPS program has repaired or replaced gas furnaces and gas water heaters for 2600 low-income senior homeowners in the state of Georgia. HopeWorks discussed how their services beyond the Metro Atlanta Area to help seniors in the following additional Georgia cities:

Rome
Cartersville
Athens
Gainesville
Macon
Augusta
Savannah
Brunswick
Columbus
Valdosta
Newnan
Griffin

HopeWorks discussed five (5) major benefits of this program that have been documented over the past 13 years:

1. Low-income senior homeowners have heat and hot water restored to their homes so they can continue to live in the comfort and safety of their own home. They no longer have to heat water on the stove for bathing or use unsafe means to heat their homes.

2. Local contractors are hired to perform the work infusing dollars and jobs into these local communities.

3. Atlanta Gas Light Company and Gas Marketers realize increased revenues as these seniors are able to use natural gas.

4. Partnerships are formed with existing city, state, federal and private agencies to help them better serve their clientele. The HELPS program allows these agencies to stretch their funding dollars by working with HopeWorks to provide services these agencies would have had to pay for otherwise.

5. Additionally, HopeWorks stated it also manages the Georgia Power Weatherization Program for low-income seniors around the state of Georgia. Because of this partnership with Georgia Power, they are able to enhance the benefits to low-income seniors by utilizing the services of both programs. The HELPS program is able to provide updated energy efficient gas equipment while the Georgia Power Weatherization Program is able to make the home more energy efficient and comfortable. Each program has several mutually beneficial overlaps that help to make HopeWork's outreach more efficient and services more comprehensive.

C. HELPS Program Scope per the Petition

The HELPS Program Scope provides the program requirements for a low-income senior citizen to qualify and participate in the program.

1. The participant must be a Residential AGLC natural gas customer served by a Gas Marketer.

2. The participant must be the homeowner and living in the home.

3. The participant must be age 65 years or older.

4. The participants must have total incomes that are 200% or lower than the Federal Poverty guidelines.

5. The annual household limit of USF assistance is **$6,000** including administration fees.

6. The maximum percentage of administration fees charged is 10% of each individual completed job.

7. The person making the application is a U.S. citizen, qualified alien or permanent resident.

D. HELPS Target Outcomes per the Petition

The Target Outcomes and Objectives of the Emergency Program include the following:

1. Low-income senior homeowners are being given a hand up by allowing them to stay in their homes through the repair and/ or replacement of their gas furnace and gas water heaters.

2. These same low-income seniors are safer in their homes by not having to use unsafe and alternative means to heat their homes while their gas furnaces are inoperable while risking CO2 poisoning.

3. Jobs are being created and businesses kept viable by employing licensed heating and cooling contractors around the state to install and repair Gas Appliances for low-income senior citizens .

4. The AGLC and Gas Marketers are able to keep gas customers who would otherwise "drop off" the system because they do not have funds to repair or replace their Gas Appliances. This program has provided a net benefit in adding to AGLC's revenue requirement and the Gas Marketer's net income.

E. HELPS Monthly Reporting

HopeWorks will continue to file monthly reporting as approved in the 2015 Joint Petition. HopeWorks files the previous month's activity by the 15th of the following month. The following are currently required as part of the reporting:

1. Monthly Filing Cover Sheet
2. Attachment I (Quick Summary)
3. Attachment II (Excel Analysis)

F. HopeWorks Requests for 2025 – 2029

1. HopeWorks has requested a continuation of the HELPS program. For Years 2025-2029, HopeWorks requests that **$700,000** a year will be disbursed from the USF, for a total commitment of **$3,500,000**.

2. HopeWorks has requested that the disbursements take place by November 1st of each year to coincide with the beginning of the winter heating season.

3. HopeWorks has requested that any unused funds during the calendar year rollover to the next year.

4. Since inception in 2011, the HELPS program has had a maximum cap per home of $6,000 which includes the 10% administrative fee. HopeWorks has stated that the rising costs of materials and labor have made it challenging to keep costs on some homes within that range. The need to replace a furnace and water heater in the same home makes this per home cap prohibitive for replacing both Gas Appliances. HopeWorks is requesting an increase in the per home cap from **$6,000** per home to **$7,000** per home.

5. HopeWorks requests approval of the HELPS Program Scope.

6. HopeWorks requests approval of the HELPS Target Outcomes.

7. HopeWorks requests approval to continue with the HELPS Monthly Reporting.

III. Staff Analysis

The Staff analyzed the HopeWorks June 27, 2024, petition and the July 22, 2019, Final Order in Docket No. 12897. The Staff reviewed the HopeWorks numbers related to USF funding received by HopeWorks, USF funding used, households served, and appliances repaired or replaced. The Staff found the numbers provided by HopeWorks and those used by the Staff were divergent. When analyzing the data, the main difference was the inclusion of data from the former six (6) agencies that were once part of the former Emergency Program that impacted both the Staff and HopeWorks data. The Staff isolated the HopeWorks data and developed a new reporting format that only included the HopeWorks data. On July 19, 2024, the Staff and HopeWorks ("Parties") met to discuss the revised analysis, and the Parties agreed with the accuracy of the data.

A. USF Funding, Households Served, and Gas Appliances Repaired/Replaced

In **Table-1** below, the total USF funding received by HopeWorks since the inception of this program is provided . The total USF funding received was **$8,422,977**.

Table-1: HopeWorks USF Funding Received:

Docket	Document	USF Funding Approved	USF Funding Disbursed	RSM/HopeWorks USF Disbursements
12897	138986	11/7/2011	11/21/2011	$575,555.00
12897	138986	11/7/2011	11/13/2012	$575,555.00
12897	150866	12/5/2013	12/13/2013	$700,643.40
12897	155584	10/14/2014	11/20/2014	$670,000.00
12897	160288	9/22/2015	10/6/2015	$600,000.00
12897	165393	9/28/2016	10/18/2016	$600,000.00
12897	165393	9/28/2016	10/19/2017	$700,000.00
12897	165393	9/28/2016	7-13-2018 & 11-1-2018	$800,000.00
12897	177780	7/22/2019	5-8-2019 & 10-17-2019	$401,224.00
12897	177780	7/22/2019	12/4/2020	$700,000.00
12897	177780	7/22/2019	1-29-2021 & 10-21-2021	$700,000.00
12897	177780	7/22/2019	10/20/2022	$700,000.00
12897	177780 & 216451	7/22/2019 & 11-21-2023	11-17-2023 & 11-22-2023	$700,000.00
	Total Disbursed			$8,422,977.40

In **Table-2** below, the USF funding used by HopeWorks since the inception of the program through June 2024 that provided emergency support to low-income senior citizens, which totals **$8,063,416 is provided.**

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Table-2: HopeWorks USF Funding Used:

Year	HopeWorks USF Funding Used	Accumulative
2012	$520,587.98	$520,587.98
2013	$748,303.56	$1,268,891.54
2014	$643,859.59	$1,912,751.13
2015	$523,516.19	$2,436,267.32
2016	$527,363.57	$2,963,630.88
2017	$717,885.03	$3,681,515.91
2018	$534,043.46	$4,215,559.37
2019	$694,245.44	$4,909,804.81
2020	$656,147.96	$5,565,952.77
2021	$691,274.96	$6,257,227.73
2022	$757,480.46	$7,014,708.18
2023	$720,483.63	$7,735,191.82
2024	$328,224.45	$8,063,416.26
Total USF Funds Used	$8,063,416.26	

As seen in **Table-3** below, HopeWorks has served **2,147** households since the inception of the program through June 2024.

Table-3: HopeWorks Households Served

Year	HopeWorks HH Served	Accumulative
2012	273	
2013	217	490
2014	172	662
2015	137	799
2016	129	928
2017	168	1,096
2018	140	1,236
2019	177	1,413
2020	156	1,569
2021	162	1,731
2022	172	1,903
2023	175	2,078
2024	69	2,147
	2,147	

As provided in **Table-4** below, since the inception of the program through June 2024, HopeWorks has repaired or replaced **2,933** Gas Appliances for low-income senior citizens.

Table-4: HopeWorks Gas Appliances

Year	Appliances Repaired or Replaced	Accumulative
2012	325	
2013	293	618
2014	236	854
2015	196	1,050
2016	188	1,238
2017	265	1,503
2018	203	1,706
2019	243	1,949
2020	214	2,163
2021	227	2,390
2022	226	2,616
2023	220	2,836
2024	97	2,933
	2,933	

B. Program Scope, Target Outcomes, and Monthly Reporting – Staff Analysis

The Staff has reviewed HopeWorks proposed Program Scope, Target Outcomes, and the Monthly Reporting provided in the petition and found each to be similar to that approved as part of the July 22, 2019, Final Order in Docket No. 12897. HopeWorks has requested to increase the household limit from **$6,000** to **$7,000** due to the rising costs of materials and labor. In Staff's opinion this request appears reasonable with the increase in costs in the economy since this issue was last visited in 2019.

C. HopeWorks USF Available Funds

When reviewing **Table-1**, the total USF funding received by HopeWorks was **$8,422,977**, and **Table-2** provides the total USF funding used ending June 2024, **$8,063,416**. The revised ending June 2024 balance of HopeWorks funds available to serve low-income senior citizens from July – December 2024 is **$359,461**.

When analyzing the HopeWorks USF funds used for July – December 2023, the dollar amount was **$413,567**. When reviewing the USF funds used for January – June 2024, the dollar amount was **$328,224**. The analysis indicates that HopeWorks will reach a **$0.00** balance on USF funds available by or before the end of December 2024.

D. USF Unencumbered Funding

The Staff has reviewed the 2024 USF available funds. As provided in **Table-5** below, the USF available and unencumbered funds total **$8,732,419**. If the Commission approves the HopeWorks request, the USF available funding would be **$5,232,419**.

Table-5: 2024 USF Available Funds:

USF 2024 Plan			**2024: O.C.G.A. 46-4-161(b)**
Projects	**Cost to Serve**	**Totals**	**$25,000,000**
Jackson County Project	2024 USF Funding	$150,663.00	$24,849,337.00
McIntosh County Project	2024 USF Funding	$14,829,429.00	$10,019,908.00
Total Projects	**2024 Plan**	**$14,980,092.00**	
Estimated Regulated Provider	2024 Estimated	$627,489.25	$9,392,418.75
Low-Income Assistance: Salvation	2024 Approved	$660,000.00	$8,732,418.75
		$1,287,489.25	
Total 2024 USF Projected Spending		**$16,267,581.25**	**$8,732,418.75**

IV. Commission Decision

During the August 20, 2024 Administrative Session, Commissioner Johnson offered the following Motion:

> I move for the approval of the HopeWorks June 27th petition with the following modification: I move for the approval of the 2025 funding of $700,000, with a 3 percent increase for each year thereafter for the years 2026 through 2029, with the following annual USF disbursements: 2025 would be $700,000; 2026, $721,000; 2027, $742,630; 2028, $764,909; and 2029, $787,856, or a total USF funding of $3,716,395. The Staff will continue to review the monthly reporting to track the progress of this program.

The Commission approved Commissioner Johnson's Motion.

V. Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law

Based on a thorough review of the evidence and information presented in the HopeWorks Petition, the Commission makes the following findings of fact and conclusions of law. The Commission finds and concludes that the request in the HopeWorks Petition is in the public interest and meets the tenants in O.C.G.A. 46-1-161(a)(3) and shall be approved as requested with the following.

The HopeWorks HELPS Program is approved in the following:

1. For year 2025, HopeWorks is approved for a USF disbursement of $700,000 to be wired by November 1, 2024.

2. For year 2026, HopeWorks is approved for a USF disbursement of $721,000 to be wired by November 1, 2025.

3. For year 2027, HopeWorks is approved for a USF disbursement of $742,630 to be wired by November 1, 2026.

4. For year 2028, HopeWorks is approved for a USF disbursement of $764,909 to be wired by November 1, 2027.

5. For year 2029, HopeWorks is approved for a USF disbursement of $787,856 to be wired by November 1, 2028.

6. Any unused funds during the calendar year rollover to the next year is approved.

7. The HopeWorks HELPS Program Scope is approved

8. The HopeWorks HELPS Target Outcomes is approved.

9. The HopeWorks Monthly Reporting is approved.

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VI. Ordering Paragraphs

WHEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED, that the HopeWorks Petition is approved as modified by the Commission Johnson Motion.

ORDERED FURTHER, that all Findings, Conclusions and Directives contained within are adopted as Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law and by this Commission shall be strictly complied with by the Petitioner.

ORDERED FURTHER, that jurisdiction over this proceeding is expressly retained for the purpose of entering such further Order or Orders, as this Commission may deem proper.

ORDERED FURTHER, any motion for reconsideration, rehearing or oral argument shall not stay the effectiveness of this Order unless expressly ordered by the Commission.

The above by action of the Commission in Administrative Session on the 20th day of August 2024.

Sallie Tanner
Executive Secretary

Jason Shaw
Chairman

8-26-24
Date

8-26-24
Date