



# MEMORANDUM

EUGENE WATER & ELECTRIC BOARD



TO: Commissioners Simpson, Brown, Helgeson, Manning and Mital  
 FROM: Mark Freeman, Energy Management & Customer Services Manager  
 DATE: March 14, 2016  
 SUBJECT: EWEB Customer Care Service Level Provided by Catholic Community Services  
 OBJECTIVE: Information Only

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## Issue

The Board received input that the service level for customers receiving EWEB Customer Care had been negatively impacted when Catholic Community Services (CCS) took over from Saint Vincent de Paul (SVdP).

## Background

EWEB contracts with Lane County Human Services Division (LCHSD) to administer the Customer Care Programs. In turn LCHSD currently subcontracts to CCS (Eugene and Springfield). CCS became, and remains, the primary subcontractor for the 2013-2014 heating season, October 1, 2013 to September 30, 2014. Prior to this, LCHSD subcontractors were SVdP serving greater Eugene customers, CCS Springfield serving EWEB’s upriver customers only, and Campbell Senior Center which is operated by the City of Eugene, serving EWEB customers with household members age 60 or older. These sub-agency relationships are designed to best meet greater community needs, as well as to serve other community assistance program needs in addition to EWEB Programs. EWEB’s annual Customer Care statistics:

	Approved Budget	Customer Donation, Reserves & Other	Total Budget	Total Customers Helped
2013	\$1,680,144	\$1,142,000	\$2,822,144	11,212
2014	\$1,381,097	\$500,000	\$1,881,097	5,739
2015	\$1,316,436	\$500,000	\$1,816,436	6,016
2016	\$1,598,871			TBD

Eligibility for assistance is based upon the heating season, October through September, while budget is approved and allocated by calendar year, January through December. During the last heating season SVdP was the primary subcontractor, 2013-2014, Eugene experienced a prolonged cold snap in November and December 2013 which in-turn created excess revenue. In response to this EWEB chose

to take the extra revenue, approximately \$642k, and automatically issue credits to customers who had received Customer Care assistance the previous year. This resulted in approximately 3,200 customers not having to go through the intake process at SVdP or the other subcontracted agencies. Also in the 2013-2014 heating season EWEB released \$500k from Customer Care donated funds.

## **Discussion**

As you can see from the table above, the last year that SVdP was the primary subcontractor was a very robust year as far as EWEB funding goes and the number of customers served. Also, 3,200 customers who had previously received assistance experienced the most streamlined process ever with the automatic credit to their account by not having an intake appointment. This cleared the way for customers who had never received assistance before and their first experience with Customer Care was during an extremely well-funded time. As a result the waiting list closed early only one month during the 2013-2014 heating season and that was on November 19, 2013. This means the other 11 months customers could call the entire month and receive an appointment.

The first year for CCS, 2014-2015 heating season, had some growing pains that caused some inconvenience with some customers, mostly around CCS's phone system. That was fixed relatively quickly and CCS took it upon themselves to invest more than \$34k to upgrade their phone system to benefit EWEB customers, and enhance their sub-contract relationship with LCHSD. However, as you can see from the table above EWEB's base budget was reduced by \$300k and only \$500k of donated funds were added compared to \$1,142,000 in the previous heating season. This reduction in funds created more frequent instances of the waiting list closing before the end of the month. In fact, in the 2014-2015 heating season, the waiting list was closed between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> in 9 of 12 months. This seems to be consistent with the first 5 months of the 2015-2016 heating season as well.

I cannot speak to the individual experience the customer(s) who contacted the Board had. However, as you can see from the above positive events that happened in the last year of SVdP role and all the changes with EWEB funding that have occurred since CCS took over, it is easy to see how a customer may feel like the level of service has changed.

Tom Mulhern from CCS has attached a memo which adds some additional process information.

## **Recommendation and Requested Action**

No action required information only. Please contact me if you have any questions.



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EUGENE: 1464 West 6th Avenue | Eugene, Oregon 97402  
541-345-3628 | [www.CCSLC.org](http://www.CCSLC.org)

To: Mark Freeman, Energy Management & Customer Services Manager, EWEB  
From: Tom Mulhern, Executive Director  
Date: March 8, 2016  
RE: EWEB Customer Care Service Level Provided by Catholic Community Services

The purpose of this memo is to provide additional information regarding the EWEB Customer Care service levels at Catholic Community Services (CCS). As you know, EWEB contracts with the Lane County Human Services Division (LCHSD) for EWEB Customer Care (ECC) services, and LCHSD in turn contracts with Catholic Community Services for ECC services to customers in Eugene and Springfield.

CCS receives a variable monthly allocation of ECC funding from Lane County. The amount of funding allocated each month is determined by Lane County in consultation with EWEB. Relatively larger amounts are allocated during the heating season, but some funds are allocated throughout the year, depending on the overall ECC budget and donations.

CCS opens the waiting list on the first working day of each month. Customers call in to get their name on the waiting list. When the waiting list reaches the number of households that can be helped with the amount of funding allocated for that month, we close the waiting list. We then call back each person on the waiting list (making at least two tries to reach each person), schedule and conduct their energy assistance appointment, authorize their energy assistance, and commit the funds available for that month. We consistently spend out the ECC funding that is allocated for the month.

Each customer has a 20-minute energy assistance appointment with a trained CCS energy specialist. During this appointment, we review all necessary documents to verify eligibility, we provide energy conservation information tailored to the specific energy source used by the customer, and we actively refer customers to other sources of assistance available at CCS and other community organizations.

All customers have to get on the waiting list in order to get an energy assistance appointment. The only exceptions are customers who meet crisis criteria that have been defined by LCHSD. A shut-off notice by itself does not meet crisis criteria. In previous years, customers with a shut-off notice were able to walk in and get energy assistance without being on the waiting list. It is my understanding that EWEB felt this was encouraging poor customer payment patterns, and we have been instructed by LCHSD to strictly follow the waiting list/crisis criteria procedures.

We appreciate the opportunity to partner with EWEB and Lane County to serve low-income EWEB customers, and we are working hard to operate the program as designed and required in our contract. If EWEB and Lane County wish to modify the program in order to better serve EWEB customers, we are willing and able to implement different procedures.