



Agenda Date: 10/28/26
Agenda Item: 7A

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
Board of Public Utilities
44 South Clinton Avenue, 1st Floor
Post Office Box 350
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0350
www.nj.gov/bpu/

CUSTOMER ASSISTANCE

IN THE MATTER OF THE ENERGY ASSISTANCE	)	ORDER AUTHORIZING
GRANT AS AUTHORIZED UNDER N.J.S.A. 48:2-29.39	)	GRANT AWARD
AND N.J.S.A. 46:30B-74(b) PAYMENT ASSISTANCE	)	
FOR GAS AND ELECTRIC (PAGE) PROGRAM	)	DOCKET NO. EG26050200

Parties of Record:

Brian O. Lipman, Esq., Director, Division of Rate Counsel
Cheryl Stowell, CEO, SHARES Nation, Inc.
Aaron Edge, Principal Director, Slipstream, Inc.

BY THE BOARD:

By this Order, the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities ("Board" or "BPU") considers a recommendation from Board Staff ("Staff") to award funding to a non-profit organization to administer the Board's Payment Assistance for Gas and Electric program ("PAGE") during the next PAGE contract period, which begins January 2, 2027.

BACKGROUND/PROCEDURAL HISTORY

N.J.S.A. 48:2-29.39 authorizes the Board to designate an established statewide non-profit energy assistance organization to receive supplemental funding from unclaimed property held by the State's electric and gas utilities pursuant to N.J.S.A. 46:30B-74. N.J.S.A. 46:30B-74 directs the administrator of the Unclaimed Utility Deposit Trust Fund ("Trust Fund") to provide seventy-five percent (75%) of the money in the Trust Fund to the New Jersey Statewide Heating Assistance and Referral for Energy Services Nation, Inc. ("SHARES"), or to another statewide nonprofit energy assistance organization designated by the Board within forty-five (45) days of the receipt of such funds. This funding makes the PAGE Program possible. The non-profit entity designated by the Board to receive the funds must use them to help electric or natural gas customers pay their electric or natural gas bills to avoid termination of service or restore service. SHARES is the current PAGE program administrator and the Board's contract with the SHARES expires on December 31, 2026.

At its June 10, 2026 agenda meeting, the Board authorized the issuance of a Notice of Fund Availability ("NOFA") to solicit bids to procure an administrator for the next PAGE contract period. The NOFA was published in the New Jersey Register on July 6, 2026, as well as on the Board's website. The NOFA was also emailed to various listservs related to utility assistance and energy

efficiency programs, to BPU email subscribers, and various energy assistance and energy efficiency organizations. Additionally, a question-and-answer period was provided to all potentially interested bidders from July 6, 2026 through July 13, 2026, however no questions were received. The deadline by which applicants were required to submit their proposals to the Board was 5:00 PM on September 4, 2026. The NOFA further provided that the Board would notify bidders of its decision by November 1, 2026.

The NOFA informed the public that the Board was seeking an entity:

“...To administer a program that provides assistance towards payment of electric and/or natural gas utility bills for households seeking aid. The beneficiaries of such assistance will be public utility customers, hereinafter referred to generally as “Limited Income Households” and more specifically defined as follows: 1) New Jersey households with zero-to-moderate income; and 2) Facing a financial hardship that includes a recent documented notice of overdue payment for natural gas and/or electric service on the utility bill for which payment assistance is being sought.

Further, the NOFA indicated that, where practicable, if a PAGE applicant is income eligible for New Jersey’s Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (“LIHEAP”) or the Universal Service Fund (“USF”) Program, the applicant should be directed to apply for those programs first in order to maximize total available benefits prior to seeking additional aid from the PAGE program. The NOFA indicated that no more than one (1) PAGE grant for electric service and one (1) PAGE grant for gas service may be provided to any applicant within a twelve (12)-month period.

Additionally, the NOFA informed bidders that funding received by the chosen grantee must be split into two (2) separate accounts: 1) for low-income applicants (at or below the LIHEAP income limits); and 2) for moderate-income applicants (above the USF/LIHEAP income limits up to moderate income). Potential bidders were also informed that the chosen grantee shall provide information to PAGE qualifying households regarding New Jersey’s State and utility-sponsored energy efficiency and renewable energy programs that are designed to serve low to moderate income households.

Finally, the NOFA clarified that categorical eligibility for this program should be used where possible by the Program Administrator if it is demonstrated that the customer has recently participated in another income-based program in New Jersey, such as the USF or LIHEAP programs.

The deadline by which applicants were required to submit their proposals to the Board was 5:00 p.m. on September 4, 2026. In accordance with the requirements contained in the NOFA, the Board received two (2) proposals from:

1. SHARES; and
2. Slipstream, Inc. (“Slipstream”)

An evaluation committee (“Committee”), consisting of five (5) representatives from Staff, reviewed the proposals.

The Committee was responsible for performing a review of each proposal received. The NOFA provides a complete list of the evaluation criteria which were utilized by the Committee. The focus

of the Committee's review was on the strengths and weaknesses of each proposal as it related to the applicant's ability to undertake and successfully complete the work required for the PAGE grant as specified in the NOFA.

The Committee utilized a technical scoring format based on assigning points to each of the evaluation criteria listed in that section of the NOFA.

RECOMMENDATION

As set forth in the Committee's evaluation report, the Committee selected SHARES as the highest scoring bidder. The Committee members agree with the final scoring to rank SHARES number one and recommended the selection of SHARES as the recipient of the PAGE grant.

The Committee selected SHARES for several reasons, including its twenty-eight (28) years of experience administering utility assistance programs statewide delivering \$108 million to over 243,000 households in need. The Committee also noted SHARES network of over 250 partner organizations statewide [an average of twelve (12) per county] which helps bear the statewide burden of processing applications and is also beneficial in spreading awareness of the grant's availability to residents in need who go to these partners in search of help. The Committee was additionally pleased with SHARES' ability to stack PAGE grants with its existing portfolio of utility assistance programs including the SHARES Energy Assistance Grant, Municipal Customer Assistance Program and water and wastewater assistance programs.

The Committee appreciated SHARES' high level of detail using narrative and informative colorful graphics to illustrate: the proposed PAGE eligibility and award criteria for both low- and moderate-income households; the required documentation; the application process from application submission to award; categorical eligibility; recertification procedures; and appeals process for denied applications.

The Committee was further pleased with SHARES' detailed marketing and outreach plan for increasing awareness of the grant to the target population, including geofencing for targeted real time mobile updates regarding local outreach events, print and digital media, paid social media campaigns as well as working directly with the utilities to reach customers in arrears. SHARES described its many years of experience working with investor-owned utility companies across different sectors, which the Committee determined gave them a large client base with which to conduct outreach.

In regards to language access for New Jersey's uniquely diverse population, SHARES indicated that it hires bilingual staff and contracts with a translation service that can provide translation in over 200 languages. Additionally, each SHARES employee is equipped with *Pockettalk*, a translation assistant that can be used at community outreach events or over the phone. The Committee valued this demonstrated commitment to program access.

SHARES also confirmed that they currently provide information about all the Board's renewable energy and energy efficiency programs in an effective manner, using verified household income to steer the PAGE household toward the programs for which it is income eligible.

SHARES confirmed they would continue to pre-screen applicants by income and household size to direct applicants to the USF and LIHEAP programs prior to issuing PAGE dollars in order to maximize available funding. Additionally, SHARES confirmed that if a PAGE household is an active USF or LIHEAP recipient, or is participating in other means tested low-income programs, SHARES would consider that household categorically eligible for PAGE.

Below is a summary of the PAGE program SHARES proposes for the next three-year contract period. There are two (2) PAGE grant caps, one (1) for low-income households and one (1) for moderate-income households. SHARES estimates they would be able to provide PAGE grants to approximately 5,000 households in need using the average \$4 million of estimated annual funding:

SHARES PAGE Program	Low-income	Moderate-income
Income Eligibility Range	Zero to 60% State Median Income ¹	\$1 over 60% SMI up to State Median Income ²
Application Window	July, August, September	Year round
PAGE Grant Cap Amount	\$500 per utility	\$700 per utility
Other Benefits Available to this Income Range	USF (max. \$2,400) LIHEAP (max. \$1,278) Lifeline (\$225) SMART (\$500 per utility)	SHARES Energy Grant (\$700 max per utility) SMART \$500 max per utility
Good Faith Payment	Waived	\$25 for one utility or \$12.50 for each utility

Staff noted one (1) item in SHARES' proposal, which would constitute a change to the current PAGE program. SHARES proposed to limit the number of months a low-income household would be able to take advantage of the PAGE program. SHARES suggested that instead of the current year-round access, low-income households who have already taken advantage of the USF and LIHEAP programs, would be able to apply for PAGE only during the months of July, August and September.³ SHARES stated in its proposal that the September 30 date can be extended if desired by the Board. SHARES explained that this change would result in conserving more of the limited PAGE grant funding for moderate income households.⁴ SHARES further clarified that moderate income households do not have access to the USF⁵ or the federal LIHEAP program and therefore rely mainly on SHARES moderate income programs and the Board's seasonal protection programs for support.

¹ Sixty percent (60%) State Median Income for a four-person household is \$98,602.

² State Median Income for a four-person household is \$164,337.

³ This would be outside the LIHEAP application window.

⁴ While varying from month to month, approximately sixty percent (60%) of PAGE funding currently is disbursed to low-income households.

⁵ Staff also notes that low-income USF customers have access to the USF-Fresh Start energy debt forgiveness program.

Staff agrees that moderate income households have limited options when dealing with a temporary financial crisis, such as job loss or health struggles. However, Staff disagrees that the PAGE application window for low-income applicants should be limited to only three (3) months per year. Therefore, Staff recommends that the Board limit the number of months a low-income household can receive benefits from the PAGE program to those months outside the Board's seasonal protection programs,⁶ specifically:

For electric grants:

- 1) September 1st through November 14th; and
- 2) March 16th through June 14th

For gas grants:

- 1) March 16th through November 14th.

Staff also recommends that Staff be given the flexibility to adjust the low-income PAGE application windows during the next contract, based on: 1) changes to the USF or LIHEAP programs; and 2) PAGE funding availability.

Staff also noted that SHARES indicated it would continue to require that moderate income applicants make a \$25 good faith payment to their utility company within ninety (90) days of their application for PAGE, with the ability for the applicant to split the payment between gas and electric bills (\$12.50 each), if a customer applied for a PAGE grant for gas and electric at the same time. While Staff agrees that a good faith payment is a reasonable requirement for moderate income families, Staff recommends that the amount be increased to \$50, which can be split into \$25 per utility company, if the customer applies for a PAGE grant for gas and electric at the same time. Staff believes a higher good faith payment amount would have more success in the customer reestablishing payment compliance with the utility company.

The SHARES proposal was sufficiently detailed, well thought out and thorough and led the Committee to conclude that SHARES can best implement the PAGE program in the most efficient and effective manner and therefore unanimously recommends SHARES be chosen as the PAGE program administrator for the next contract period.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The Board recognizes the need for an open and transparent bidding process where public funds are concerned. After a review of the evaluation process, the Board **HEREBY FINDS** the process was fair and impartial. Each Committee member independently evaluated each proposal, based upon the criteria as specified in the NOFA, and each Committee member was provided with specific instructions for following the NOFA criteria and applying them when scoring the applications. Therefore, each applicant was afforded the same opportunity to compete for the PAGE grant.

⁶ The Winter Termination Program protects certain categories of gas, electric, water and wastewater customers from disconnection from November 15th to March 15th and the Summer Termination Program protects certain categories of electric, water and wastewater customers from disconnection from June 15th to August 30th. There is no income limit on these seasonal protection programs.

Applications were scored based upon the information each applicant provided by the application deadline. The details of each proposal were carefully reviewed by the Committee and, based upon the applications presented, SHARES submitted the highest-ranking proposal.

The Board **HEREBY ACCEPTS** the recommendation of the Committee to award the PAGE grant to SHARES for a three (3)-year period. The Board **HEREY DIRECTS** that any unspent funds at the end of the contract shall be returned from SHARES to the State or transferred by SHARES to the Board's designated grantee.

The Board **HEREBY DIRECTS** that SHARES incorporate Staff's recommended modifications above to its proposed PAGE program. The Board further **DIRECTS** that these modifications shall be included in the final contract or grant agreement with SHARES.

The Board also **DIRECTS** the utilities to work with SHARES to ensure applicants who have applied for and met the eligibility requirements of a PAGE grant will have that grant applied towards their utility bill in a timely manner. Additionally, the Board **DIRECTS** the utilities to protect a PAGE recipient from shut off of service for at least thirty (30) days after the grant is applied to the utility account.

The Board **HEREBY AUTHORIZES** the Board President to execute the contract or grant agreement with SHARES to implement PAGE.

SHARES shall adhere to the reporting requirements as set forth in the NOFA of Grant Availability and any other reporting requirements specified in the contract.

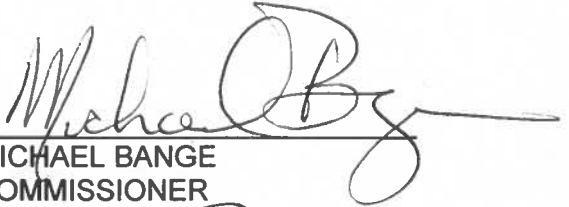
The effective date of this Order is November 4, 2026.

DATED: October 28, 2026

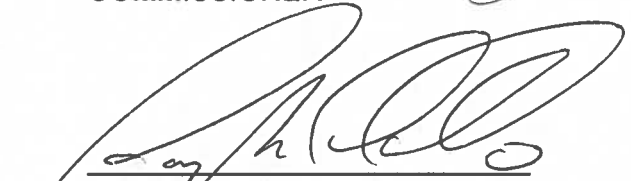
BOARD OF PUBLIC UTILITIES
BY:


BEN HERTZSHARGEL
PRESIDENT

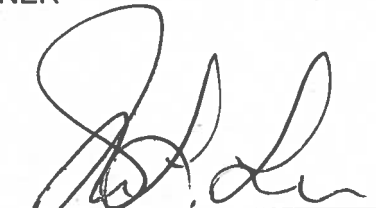

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ATTEST:


SHERRI L. LEWIS
BOARD SECRETARY

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the within
document is a true copy of the original
in the files of the Board of Public Utilities.

IN THE MATTER OF THE ENERGY ASSISTANCE GRANT AS AUTHORIZED UNDER N.J.S.A. 48:2-29.39 AND N.J.S.A. 46:30B-74(b) - PAYMENT ASSISTANCE FOR ELECTRIC AND GAS PROGRAM

DOCKET NO. EG26050200

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