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Strengthening Communities, Empowering People

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**Unisource Rate Case Public Comment Statement
March 1, 2016**

Good Morning, my name is Gina Whittington and I am the Human Service Director and interim Area Agency on Aging Director for Western Arizona Council of Governments. WACOG is a governmental non-profit that for more than 40 years has been dedicated to serving low-income households and vulnerable populations in Arizona's La Paz, Yuma and Mohave Counties. As the designated Community Action Agency, Head Start provider, and Area Agency on Aging for this Region, WACOG provides a comprehensive array of services that support people and communities in achieving self-sufficiency. WACOG strives to alleviate the symptoms and eradicate the causes of poverty by identifying community needs, mobilizing available resources, coordinating services for a client centered and holistic approach, administering programs, such as the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, the Weatherization Program with the help of our Utility Partners, Housing Counseling Programs as a HUD approved Local Housing Counseling Agency, Financial Capabilities Coaching, Energy Education and Conservation workshops and many, many, more. We have two main offices, one in Kingman and one in Yuma, three satellite offices (all in Mohave County) and approximately 236 staff and 85 volunteers, serving over 23,000 individuals and families annually.

The Proposed changes to Unisource Electric rates will disproportionately affect the clients we serve, especially the elderly on fixed incomes. Also in Mohave County, a large portion of the housing low income and elderly live in is dilapidated or near that point and very energy inefficient. Much of our focus is on outreach and engagement of this population as they do not usually ask for help or seek assistance. We do this through all of our programs; The Aging & Disability Resource Center, Home and Community Based programs for the elderly, Case Management, Weatherization programs, Utility, Rent and Mortgage Assistance programs. Once engaged our job becomes assisting the elderly to use their utilities and to help show them how they can manage the cost and still pay for their basic needs. Through our Area Agency on Aging, the Case Managers will tell you in the heat of summer they will find their elderly clients, many of whom are single individuals in Mohave County, not running their air conditioner or heater in the winter. They are stretching medication or not filling a prescription; they are not buying food or getting proper nutrition. They are geographically isolated and cannot afford gas or car repairs if they have a car.

The Proposed fixed Charges will limit the control the customer has and the ability we have to impact the behavior of the resident and the energy efficiency cost savings to the homeowner. It will be even harder to encourage the elderly to turn on their air conditioner in the summer or to buy the needed medications and food. Also with the elderly population, navigating systems is overwhelming, assistance in navigating programs like Medicare Part A, B, D, health insurance & explanation of benefits etc. as I know we all can relate to, are examples The proposed Demand Charges are confusing and managing the utility bill with or without the assistance of "smart appliances" will be one more thing this population will need help navigating and another piece which will disproportionately affect the low income and especially elderly or disabled on fixed incomes.

I have used the word "disproportionate" throughout my statement, each of the proposed changes, fixed charges, Deposit rules, payment plan rules, demand charges, all have an effect and when applied to a population of low income, elderly and disabled living on fixed incomes in housing which is not energy efficient, the effect is amplified by the starting point being a negative position.

Finally, I would like to say that the CARES discount has been very helpful for low-income customers and the elderly and WACOG assists our customers in enrolling in this program. Increasing the eligibility to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level would help provide this discount to the working poor and the elderly struggling on a fixed income.

Thank you,