

July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Dear Members of the Low-Income Oversight Board,

**We request the Low-Income Oversight Board's support in urging an increase to the CHANGES program budget in the recently filed bridge application of the CARE proceeding.** This letter is to serve as a follow-up to the LIOB meeting on December 12, 2024, where **eleven** members of the **CHANGES** collaboration attended to voice serious concerns about ongoing funding shortfalls that are undermining their ability to deliver essential services to some of California's most vulnerable communities.

### **About the CHANGES program**

The CHANGES (Community Help and Awareness of Natural Gas and Electricity Services) program assists limited-English proficient (LEP) clients in managing their natural gas and electricity services through individualized case assistance (needs assistance and dispute resolution), education, and outreach in the client's native language. This program serves immigrant, LEP, and undocumented populations who are disproportionately impacted by energy burdens and language barriers. Notably, 96% of CHANGES participants are CARE-eligible, highlighting the deep intersection between poverty, limited access, and language isolation.

### **Why Increased Funding Is Urgent and Necessary**

Despite CHANGES being transitioned from a pilot to an ongoing program in 2015, there has been no subsequent increase in funding over the last decade even as both inflation and the cost of delivering services have significantly risen.

Meanwhile, demand has surged:

- In Program Year (PY) June 2023- May 2024, CHANGES provided **8,633** case management services, compared to just 4,040 pre-pandemic in PY 2018-2019, which was the last full year prior to the Pandemic. PY 2016-2017, the first year after the program was converted from being a pilot program, there were only **3,126** cases.
- Therefore, compared to 2016, this represents **triple** the amount of service volume with a lower funding level in real terms.
- During the LIOB meeting on December 12, 2024, the minutes noted that representatives from eleven organizations that are part of the CHANGES collaboration attended to provide public comments. They emphasized that the funding available was inadequate to support the communities they serve. In fact, the coalition commented that funding typically runs out well before the end of the program year, meaning that they need to turn away consumers in hardship. The following commented at the meeting: Madera Coalition for Social Justice, Chinatown Service Center, Asian Pacific Self Development and Residential Association,

International Institute of Los Angeles, Armenian Relief Society, Korean American Community Services, the Fresno Center, Asian American Resource Center, Southeast Asian Community Center, El Concilio de San Mateo County and Milestone Consulting.

- Budget constraints have severely limited the development of new educational content, material language translations, and the timely updating of existing materials. As a result, consumers are not receiving the most current information, in some cases materials are not found in their native language under certain topics and this diminishes the ability to educate, empower, and protect vulnerable households.

### **Findings from the 2023 CHANGES Evaluation**

The 2023 CHANGES evaluation<sup>1</sup> highlighted that the CHANGES program needs the following enhancements:

- Database upgrades to ensure improved program monitoring and management. For example, adding a unique customer identifier to track the client journey from initial issue through resolution and all repeated service assistance. Additionally, enabling the system to capture all the multiple consumer issues attached to a case. The current system is restricted to recording only one issue.
- The cost for CBOs to provide client services is higher than the corresponding amount they are reimbursed. The underfunding shortfall faced by CBOs directly impacts on their ability to dedicate staff to adequately administrate and deliver program services, threatening program sustainability.
- The program is intended to be statewide, and expansion of the program is recommended for additional service areas that are underserved. However, this critical expansion is not feasible since the existing CBOs are already constrained in their service areas by the existing funding shortfall.

### **Additional Barriers: Impact of ICE Raids on Low-Income and Immigrant Communities**

The ongoing threat of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids is placing an even greater strain on the low-income, LEP, and immigrant communities that the CHANGES program serves. Increased immigration enforcement impacts these communities-many of whom already face financial hardship, language barriers, and limited access to reliable information.

ICE activity and the fear of detention or deportation can have direct economic and emotional consequences for families including:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/-/media/cpuc-website/divisions/news-and-outreach/reports/cab/changes/changes-evaluation-report-2023.pdf>

- **Sudden loss of income** if a family member is detained
- **Increased housing and utility instability**, with individuals falling behind on rent and energy bills
- **Fear of engaging with IOUS**, due to mistrust or risk of exposure

As a result, more families will require support in navigating utility challenges that the CHANGES program can assist with. Without increased funding the CHANGES program may be unable to meet the rising need caused not only by economic factors but also by growing fear and instability within immigrant communities.

### **The Ask**

Without increased funding the CHANGES program cannot meet the escalating demand or fulfill its mission of equitable service delivery. We urge the LIOB to advocate strongly for an increase to the CHANGES program budget in the CARE bridge application to ensure our communities are not left behind in a time of rising affordability crisis.

Sincerely,

**Chrystal Dorado, Project Manager for TEAM & CHANGES Programs**

**International Institute of Los Angeles** (CPUC's TEAM & CHANGES Programs Prime Contractor)

