**Consumer Alert: What You Need to Know Before Choosing a Competitive Electricity Supplier**

***What are Competitive Suppliers?***

Before electricity arrives at your home, it needs to be generated in a power plant and delivered to you. Only a few distribution utilities, such as NSTAR, National Grid, and Western Mass. Electric Company are allowed to transmit electricity in Massachusetts. But since 1998, Massachusetts has allowed other companies to generate and sell you electricity—these companies are called competitive suppliers. Competitive suppliers generate and sell electricity to you, which your local distribution utility then delivers to your home.

***Will I Ever be Forced to Purchase Electricity from a Competitive Supplier?***

*No!* You always have the option of receiving basic service from your local distribution utility. Sometimes salespeople for competitive suppliers will try to pressure you into buying their product by telling you that your local distribution utility will no longer serve you. Sometimes salespeople will pretend to represent your local distribution utility in order to trick you into thinking that you need to switch services. *Call your local distribution utility or a consumer advocate* if you have been told that you need to switch your service!

***Will a Competitive Supplier Save Me Money?***

It is possible to save some money by purchasing electricity from a competitive supplier. However, there are risks if you choose competitive supply…

***What Problems Might I Have If I Choose a Competitive Supplier?***

Many customers who choose competitive supply run into problems, including:

∙ *Dramatically higher costs*

∙ *Large fees* (some competitive suppliers charge fees for cancellation, payment processing, late payment, etc.)

∙ *Poor customer service*

∙ *Slamming* (the illegal practice of switching your service to another competitive supplier without your permission)

***What Questions Should I Ask Before Choosing a Competitive Supplier?***

The Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities requires competitive suppliers to provide you with certain information. Before choosing to purchase electricity from a competitive supplier, it is important to ask questions, including:

∙ What will I pay per kilowatt hour (kWh)?

∙ Will my rate ever change? If so, how often will it change?

∙ What charges will show up on my bill?

∙ Are there fees for cancellation? Payment processing? Late payment?

These are just some questions that will help you decide whether choosing competitive supply is right for you. But keep in mind that salespeople may not always provide you with accurate information. *Look at the contract or talk to a consumer advocate* before choosing to purchase competitive supply!