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For Immediate Release

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DEFG Consumer Survey Points to More Americans Struggling to Pay Their Utility Bills

The Challenge is Not Consumer Engagement, but the Entire Construct of Programs and Policies

Washington, DC ... DEFG, a management consulting firm specializing in consumers and consumer-facing offerings in the utility sector (www.defgllc.com) released today the findings from its annual survey of households with incomes below \$50,000. "The Long Struggle Continues: Improving Service to Low-Income Customers in the Utility Sector," relies on data from a survey of 1,000+ Americans (to yield 534 respondents). The survey was conducted in collaboration with members of the Low Income Energy Issues Forum, a diverse working group focused on innovations that make utility service more affordable.

"Forty-four percent of respondents indicated that they have trouble paying their utility bills. This is a seven percent increase over 2016," stated Nat Treadway, a Managing Partner of DEFG LLC. "Utility bill affordability will improve if we focus on what consumers with limited financial means value: eliminating utility bill uncertainty, getting help when needed, and lowering their household's cost of service."

Findings from the Annual Survey of Low-Income Households include:

- 20% of respondents indicated they applied for energy assistance over the past two years
- 61% of respondents indicated interest in types of payment assistance; payment arrangements
- 79% are at least somewhat interested in learning about ways to save on electric or heating bills
- 55% are concerned about paying fees and penalties (late fees; reconnection charges)
- 39% would choose a flat bill with the same, guaranteed monthly bill payment

"Our findings point to ways that utilities can improve service to consumers with limited financial means. Consumers are focused on their daily budget and need more convenient choices," continued Nat Treadway. "Utilities can create voluntary options with regard to many dimensions of service. Consumers will match the choices with their lifestyles."

"Low-income consumers experience high levels of stress and anxiety as they provide for their families. For many, uncertainty is caused by the utility bill, the complexity of applying for energy assistance, and confusion about how to control costs. Utilities could offer tariffs that are less confusing and provide more certainty, facilitate energy assistance through social service agencies, and offer individualized communications regarding cost. Utilities can develop a new service model that focuses on individual consumers, is much less confusing, and could give greater control."

For a free copy of the survey and to join DEFG's mailing list, go to: <http://defgllc.com/publications/>

DEFG is a management consulting firm specializing in consumers and consumer-facing offerings in the utility sector. We believe that customers are the future of energy. Since 2003, we have helped clients create value in a commodity marketplace. In our rapidly changing marketplace, customer engagement is key to success, and our clients learn to better engage with residential and commercial customers. These customers provide unique resources, reduce risks and increase revenue potential.