

Low Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting

Wednesday, August 3, 2022, 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM (EDT)

1. Call to Order

Chairperson Deb Polun called the meeting to order at 1:33 PM. Remote meeting held via Microsoft Teams.

2. Attendance

Members Present: *Deb Polun, Nora Duncan, Chris Herb, Lissa Rosso, Joanne Whistnant, Ruth Swift, Frank Augeri, Jaime Soto, Nicole Lawton, Richard Hanratty, April O’Neil Angel Battle, Alicia Dolce, Sarah White, Danielle Palladino.*

Members Absent: *Rosemary Lopez, Jeanne Pitney, Theresa Washington, Tyra Peluso, Tonya Anderson, Kathleen Wasilnak, Martha Stone, Victoria Hackett, Cassandra Norfleet-Johnson*

Host: *Starley Arias*

Guest: *Alyson Ayotte, Andrea Taylor, Zani Imetovski, Brandon Whitburn, Nickey Kollie, Gannon Long, Tammy Wilson, Peter Hadler, Carlene Taylor, Linette Pisani, Leticia Colon de Mejias*

3. Minutes for Approval

Minutes for Wednesday, June 1, 2022

Motion: Joanne Whistnant

Second: Ruth Swift

Opposed: None

Abstained: Richard Hanratty, Alicia Dolce

4. Public Comments

None

5. Committee Updates

Bylaws Committee: Nora Duncan

- Updates have been made to reflect HB 5342-An Act Concerning Membership of the Low-Income Energy Advisory Board:
 - o **Article I – Membership** – updates agency title “The Connecticut President of AARP” to “The Connecticut State Director of AARP” and adds to the board an additional representative of the Community Action Agencies administering energy assistance programs under contract with the Department of Social Services (Voting); Two representatives of water companies as defined in section 25-32a, designated by the Connecticut Water Works Association (Voting); The executive director of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center (Voting); The executive director of the Center for Children's Advocacy (Voting); The executive director of the Connecticut Green Building Council (Voting)
 - o **Article IV – Powers and Duties of the Board Chair, Vice-Chair and Deep Designee** – established the DEEP designee as the Board “Secretary”
 - o **Article VI – Committees** – Section 6.1 Committees adds that committees “to the extent possible, should reflect the composition of the membership of the Board.”

Motion to adopt the revisions of the July 2022 draft-bylaws.

Motion: Nora Duncan

Second: Nicole Lawton

Opposed: None

Abstained: Richard Hanratty, Alicia Dolce

LIHEAP Allocation Committee: (Peter Hadler)

Peter asked Lynette to give the CEAP update.

LIHEAP/CEAP Update: Lynette Pisani

Application Data Overview August 2, 2021 – July 23, 2022

- Year to Date Total: 104,971 applications taken
 - 92,180 Applications approved
 - 88% approval rating
 - 18.7% increase from last year
 - 2,127 households served for heating system repair/replacement

LIHEAP Allocation Plan: (Peter Hadler)

- The numbers are at highs that haven't been seen in eight years Due to work across agencies in emerging programs; Significant amount of additional federal funding over the last two years
- The budget to the program is back to pre-pandemic levels.
 - Approximately \$73 Million with approximately \$6 Million in carry forward.
 - Unfortunately, significant decisions will need to be made around the level of benefits that clients are able to receive.
- We are continuing to not have a liquid asset test.
- Households enrolled in SNAP will be at a new tier of benefit level. Eliminating the need to go back to the household to ask for additional information.
- The benefit matrix has been combined from five (5) down to three (3)
 - Levels 1 & 2 have been combined to level 1
 - Levels 3 & 4 have been combined to level 2
 - Level 3 picks up the highest income threshold.
- The rental assistance benefits have also reduced to pre-pandemic levels and follow the same three (3) level matrix as the basic benefits.
- The crisis assistance benefit and safety-net benefit have been combined because we are only required to have a crisis assistance benefit under federal law.
- Important dates to remember:
 - September 1st – as the start date for early applications.
 - November 1st – first day for fuel deliveries that can be paid by the program
 - March 15th – deadline for fuel authorization or deliveries

- May 31st – The last day that a household can apply to establish its eligibility for benefits
- June 16th – Last day to submit deliverable fuel bills.

Deb Polun – Last year clients with fixed income were able to use previous year income as proof of income. Is that process going to continue.

Peter Hadler stated that consideration could be given on a case-by-case basis but that with the new process of auto-enrolling clients who are in other DSS programs it simplifies income verification.

Response to LIEAB Recommendations (Peter Hadler)

- Recommendation: Integrating the Energy Assistance application with the DSS application.
 - The agency if focused on developing the online application. A new real time eligibility interface with DSS system will allow clients to skip parts of the application by checking off on enrollment in other DSS programs. This will roll out around the early intake season. We will continue to explore integrating the CEAP application with other DSS programs.
- Recommendations: Data sharing Waiver on DSS applications & Data sharing Waiver included on website/portal and app.
 - We have been actively working with utility companies to confirm client eligibility for hardship programs. We anticipate that by the end of this year we will have an interface up and ready to match against clients who consented to have DSS disclose data to the utility companies. Long-term we will explore where DSS might collect similar consent. We are seeking out funding to build out system capacity.
- Recommendation: Online application – tweak online application to customer feedback.
 - This process has been underway since before the LIEAB recommendation. Mobile compatibility will be part of the next phase.
- Recommendation: Application Status – provide software that allow intake sites & CAAs to track the status of each Energy Assistance application.
 - DSS administers with the CAAs and have look up access to determine eligibility. DSS encourages the use of the online application process.
- Recommendation: Study application denials and incompletions.
 - This is an ongoing process that is actively underway.
- Recommendation: Study allowable deductions from LIHEAP policies to determine which expenses can be deducted from gross income to increase benefit eligibility.
 - Due to limited resources, we can't get down to that granular level of analysis.
- Recommendation: Allow fixed-income households to utilize prior year's income information for two program years.
 - This matter is currently under review.
- Recommendation: DSS shall consider if the \$.10 differential should continue for oil deliveries due to price volatility
 - DSS has proposed to continue its \$.10 margin increase for all oil deliveries.
- Recommendation: requests a portion of LIHEAP funding be used to support a coordinated outreach effort.
 - Proposed LIHEAP Allocation Plan for Program Year 2022-2023 includes \$50,000.00 for outreach activities.

- Recommendation: A percentage of LIHEAP dollars be set aside for an ongoing emergency furnace repair and replacement program administered by DSS.
 - Proposed LIHEAP Allocation Plan for Program Year 2022-2023 includes funding for this activity.
- Recommendation: A percentage of LIHEAP dollars be set aside to address health and safety barriers in homes of income-eligible owners and renters.
 - Proposed LIHEAP Allocation Plan for Program Year 2022-2023 includes funding for this activity.
- Recommendation: LIHEAP supports an expenditure of LIHEAP funds to determine the cost of, and/or develop technology services and administrative support.
 - These efforts are underway.

The Block Grant Hearing is set for August 29th.

Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (Peter Hadler)

- This allocation plan is also on the agenda for the Block Grant Hearing.
 - DSS plans to continue the program as it has been administered.
 - Clarifies that households who had water costs built into their rent are eligible but requires landlords and tenants to agree.
 - The energy assistance and water assistance application are combined online.

The board agree to submit the recommendations along with the DSS responses to the committee.

6. Old Business/ Program Updates

Operation Fuel Update:

There is no update this month.

Matching Payment Program Update:

Eversource Program Updates 2022: Joanne Whistnant

- *Matching Payment Program (MPP) as of June 30, 2022*
 - *15,060 electric customers*
 - *15,194 gas customers*
 - *Total of 28,613 customers with a balance of \$35,419,546*
- *MPP and New Start Enrollments*
 - *May 2022 – 29,332*
 - *May 2021 – 30,649*
 - *MPP Difference of -1,317*

 - *May 2022 – 38,516*
 - *May 2021 – 26,640*
 - *New Start Difference of 11,876*

- *MPP Phase 1 Matches as of June 30th*
 - *2022 CT electric - \$3,735,125.13*
 - *2022 CT gas - \$2,575,230.16*
 - *2022 Total - \$6,310,355.29*
- *New Start Forgiveness January 1 – June 30th*
 - *2022 – 21,076 customers – \$14,124,834.02*
 - *2021 – 16,971 customers - \$9,219,685.07*
 - *Difference – 4,105 customers - \$4,905,148.95*

Avangrid Program Update 2022: Jaime Soto

- *Matching Payment Program July 2022*
 - *UI had 5,716 customers with a balance of \$7,235,863*
 - *SGC had 21,179 customers with a balance of \$17,103,770*
 - *CNG almost 17,901 customers with a balance of \$16,000,435*
 - *Overall total 44,796 customers with a balance of \$40,340,068*
 - *July 2021 Total 24,389 customers with a balance of \$15,560,402*
 - *Difference of \$24,779,666.00*
- *Forgiveness Program MaPP July 2022*
 - *UI had 10,821 customers with a balance of \$19,905,064*
 - *Difference of \$9,164,048 from July 2021.*
- *COVID -19 Active Payment Plan July 2022*
 - *Payments ended as of June 30th, 2022, but we still have customers enrolled as part of the 24-month period.*
 - *UI – 9,235 customers with a balance of \$10,619,397*
 - *SCG – 6,106 customers with a balance of \$6,340,847*
 - *CNG – 5,028 customers with a balance of \$5,689,849*
 - *Total – 20,369 customers with a balance of \$22,650,093*
 - *Difference of \$6,864,152 from July 2021*
- *Flexible Payment Arrangements July 1, 2022*
 - *All three companies total of 108 customers with a balance of \$110,372*

Docketed/Legislative Items (Frank Augeri)

- *Today is the hearing for Low Income Discount Rate – Docket# 17-12-03RE11*
- *The MPP Energy Affordability Proceeding 2205*
 - *There was a technical meeting last month and the Authority expects to have a draft out by mid to early October.*
- *Two new rate cases that were submitted*
 - *Aquarian Docket#22-07-01*
 - *United Illuminating notice of intent Docket# 22-08-08*

7. New Business

No new business

8. Public Comments

Leticia Colon de Mejias (Efficiency For All) – “I want to commend the work that you're doing here to utilize PREQUALIFICATIONS through DSS programs to help at risk groups connect with supports to

lower energy burdens. Also want to commend considering rent as part of the utility bill when they are tied together, the oftentimes low-income customers do live in housing where they're heat and cooling and water or part of their rent, but still the rent is raised as noted here today by your efforts. In addition, I want to commend the efforts to ensure we provide this service coupled with building physical resilience through retrofitting properties which save money, lower energy bills and could lower the expense of this program maybe allowing larger benefits to others because the amount that was reviewed today seems very low with the rising cost of fuel. Thank you so much for allowing me to make comments here today.”

April O’Neil (Waterworks Industry, Manchester Water & Sewer) – I know many of my customers that I referred were eligible to receive assistance through the water funds that were added to the HWAP. So, thank you. But secondly, we often deal with a lot of situations where we have multifamily residences and so we have an owner and three different tenants who may all three be on different income levels. You know, I'm just curious what I can tell the people that come in and ask for assistance to expect with regards to multifamily housing?

- Peter Hadler stated that his understanding is that they will be eligible but will still have to go through the landlord and some additional steps. Mr. Hadler offered to get back to Ms. O’Neil.

Danielle Palladino (OPM) - LIHEAP and LIHWAP hearing/meeting details: August 29th at 10:00 AM, virtual format. I will circulate the Bulletin notice once it has been posted! We transmitted the plans to the legislative leaders on Monday and the leaders just transmitted them to the committees of cognizance today.

Chris Herb (CEMA) – We had a meeting yesterday with DSS and I've had a couple conversations with a couple of you offline about our members’ concern about the upcoming heating season. We were hoping that we would see some relief in what our record-breaking prices and unseen volatility that we've had in the past. I just wanted to kind of give everybody a heads up that that we are involved in conversations about hopefully coming up with strategies to address that. In the spirit of making sure that there is adequate participation and that all energy assistant customers are served, it's going to be a very challenging year. I think that, you know, DSS did experience at the end of last season when we saw the prices take off some withdrawal from the program because of the volatility that we were experiencing. So again, we're trying to work on some strategies to make sure that dealer’s exposure is mitigated so that we have a successful upcoming season. I just wanted to put that for the record as we as we come out with some more formal thoughts, I'll share them with this board and potentially at the hearing at the end of the month.

Gannon Long (Operation Fuel) – Commented that Operation Fuel is interested in having further discussions on the LIWAP data and asked the following questions.

“It sounds like the real audience for LIWAP is probably the landlords themselves, and I wonder if there's some opportunity to market directly to them to promote this program?”

“Is there any type of enforcement mechanism to ensure that the benefit goes to the renter? how is the landlord required to verify that in some way?”

- Peter Hadler stated that there is a joint agreement that both landlord and tenant must sign. The landlord commits to pass the cost to the renter and if the renter does not get it, they're recourse is to file a complaint with DSS or the Community Action Agency who administered the program.

Leticia Colon de Mejias posted a question in the chat – How will the federal influx of additional LIHEAP dollars play into the energy Resilience and climate work in CT?

- Peter Hadler stated that the funds that were received were built into the allocation plan. DSS is doing supplemental cooling payments that are likely to come out in early September. Cooling payments are funds that were not used during the heating season and are later applied as a credit to customer's utility accounts to offset costs during the summer. There are a few more dollars going towards weatherization work. Mr. Hadler deferred to DEEP to answer questions on weatherization funding.

9. Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn the meeting

Motion by: Chris Herb

Second by: Nicole Lawton

No opposition

Meeting adjourned at 2:48 PM

Next meeting is scheduled for October 12, 2022, via Microsoft Teams.