

Low-Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting

Wednesday, February 2, 2022, 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM (EDT)

1. Call to Order

Vice Chairperson Wendy Wanchak called the meeting to order at 1:35 p.m. Remote meeting held via Microsoft Teams.

2. Attendance

Members Present: *Wendy Wanchak, Nora Duncan, Deb Polun, Rosemary Lopez, Nickey Kollie, Joy Hollister, Lisa Rosso, Theresa Washington, Joanne Whistnant, Ruth Swift, Tyra Peluso, Tonya Anderson, Frank Augeri, Jaime Soto Kathleen Wasilnak, Nicole Lawton, Victoria Hackett, Carlene Taylor, Danielle Palladino.*

Members Absent: *Brenda Watson*

Host: *Starley Arias, Claire Sickinger*

Guests: *Yveson Cassamajor, Saulat Wvarrda, Alyson Ayotte, Owen Rood, Tracey Pelella, Linette Pisani, Gannon Long, Kimberly White.*

3. Minutes for Approval

Minutes for Wednesday, December 1, 2021

Motion by: Kathy Wasilnak

Second by: Rosemary Lopez

Abstained: Dep Polun

Opposed by: none

4. Old Business/ Program Updates

LIHEAP/CEAP Update: Carlene Taylor & Linette Pisani

Application Data Overview August 2 – January 29, 2022: Linette Pisani

- Year to date total 67,808 applications taken.
 - Up 3.8 percent from this time last year.
 - 53,031 Applications approved (combined fuel/utility/rental)
 - 10,041 Applications denied.
 - 4,728 Applications pending.

Kimberly White asked if DSS verified that applicant's missing income information was not available in other DSS services such as SNAP.

Linette Pisani and Carlene Taylor explained that the information on the CEAP report is collected from the Community Action Agencies. Community Action Agency workers can verify information by accessing the IMPACT system and the numbers on the report reflect applicants whose data could not be verified and is still missing. DSS is still in the process of doing the data match for households.

Kimberly White: What does “application taken” mean?

Linette Pisani explained that “application taken” are applications that were either begun on the telephone with the customer or have come through email but have yet to be processed.

Carlene Taylor added that these applications are in the system and that applications that are not entered into the system do not count as part of “application taken.”

Kimberly White asked if there is available data on the number of in-person applications versus mailed-in applications with a breakdown of how many of them are incomplete applications.

Linette Pisani and Carlene Taylor stated that they could get the data on the number of mailed-in versus in-person applications but will have to reach out to the agencies to get a breakdown of how many are incomplete applications.

Kimberly White asked why the application comparison numbers for the Waterbury center differ from the rests.

Linette Pisani explained that the numbers have improved since the release of the report but that they reflect impacts on the agency due to COVID-19 and staffing changes.

Wendy Wanchak: Based on the uptick in the rate of applications for this time of year, is it projected that most of the money will be used up this year?

Carlene Taylor: We have a balance of ARPA funds that have to be spent this year. We received \$94 Million and have spent almost \$40 Million last year. The balance has to be obligated and expended this year. We are using our regular LIHEAP funds in combination to ARPA leaving us with 10 percent to carry over in LIHEAP funds.

Kimberly White asked if the households counted in the crisis and safety net assistance informed about applying for CEAP.

Carlene Taylor clarified that those households have already exhausted their CEAP benefits and now need additional deliveries.

Joy Hollister stated that a town contacted her to ask if DSS received another \$60 million dollars in fund.

Carlene Taylor clarified that there is not another allocation of funds and that the confusion came from a paper release on the level of funding for each State. Connecticut was allocated about \$154 million dollars which included \$94 million received in ARPA funds. Last year about \$40 million dollars from the ARPA fund was used and the current funding level for this year’s program is about \$134 million dollars with the balance from the ARPA and the regular LIHEAP allocation.

Joy Hollister asked if there was an update on the water assistance program.

Carlene Taylor stated that DSS is in the process of sending the contracts to the local agencies for execution and are working with the water vendors to obtain the needed documentation. Carlene reported that the major companies have submitted their documents and that DSS is working with them to finalize all of the associated costs that are separate from the costs of drinking water and wastewater.

Joy Hollister asked how much funding was set aside for the program.

Carlene Taylor stated that the funding estimate is about \$9 Million dollars. The maximum benefit is \$1,000 dollars and the basic benefit ranges from \$50 dollars to \$300 dollars.

Joy Hollister expressed that there is concern in the community that the funding will be gone by the time the program is implemented.

Carlene Taylor explained that because it is a new two-year long program and the number of qualifying applicants has yet to be determined, it is difficult to determine where the funding level will be.

Nicole Lawton asked for clarification on the 30 percent increase since last year for the approved applications.

Linette Pisani stated that she would have to check in with the community action agencies but that it could be attributed to the streamlining of processes in the application process, and the removal of the asset tests and rental assistance threshold. Linette added that making an entire household categorically eligible if one person in the household qualifies has also contributed to the approval rate.

Theresa Washington asked if this system would continue going forward.

Linette Pisani expressed the current process would continue while the current level of funding is available, but that DSS would revisit the process later if the funding is reduced.

Operation Fuel Update: Tonya Anderson

- For the Winter to Spring program, we served 1,199 households to date.
- We have noticed an increase in the number of Portal applications and Fuel Bank applications, and it could be due to the shut off notices that customers are starting to receive or have received.
- For the Winter to Spring program, we've spent \$656,000 dollars. For our Summer to Fall program we spent a little over a \$1 million dollars. Our fiscal year spending is roughly \$1,696,000 dollars.
- We are looking to increase our marketing. We are looking to increase our Portal numbers to 50 percent. We are currently at 28-29 percent.

Deb Polun asked for a comparison of these numbers to last year's numbers.

Tonya Anderson stated that she would email them.

Matching Payment Program Update:

Eversource LIHEAB Data December 2021: Theresa Washington

- MPP Initial Phase I and II Matches: Over \$10 million dollars at the end of Phase II.
- New Start Forgiveness January 1- December 31: Served over 24,000 customers receiving over \$24.4 Million dollars in forgiveness.
- Active MPP with balance: 23,279 total customers with balance of \$24.9 Million dollars.

Theresa Washington explained that the lower number of matches is attributed the more assistance in dollars that customers received.

Wendy Wanchak asked how customers whose arrearage is eliminated by Unite CT reflect on the report and if they are eliminated if they have zero balance.

Theresa Washington: It doesn't exclude them from the matching payment program because the requirement of the program is really, are you in financial hardship and are you heating. It is reducing their balance, but it doesn't remove them for the program because, although it may have reduced their balance, they're still accumulating a bill each and every month.

Wendy Wanchak: Even for the first phase that ended, if they have a zero balance, they continue on MPP?

Theresa Washington explained that it differs for Phase I due to the requirements of having to apply for energy assistance and having to make payments as part of the program. If the customer does not fulfill the requirements, they could be removed from the program after Phase I.

AVANGRID MPP Data December 2021: Kathleen Wasilnak

- Arrearage Forgiveness MPP: Combined customer total of 26,251 with a total balance of \$17.99 Million dollars.
- MaPP program UI: 5,845 customers; total balance of \$10.5 Million dollars.
- Active COVID Payment Arrangements: Combined customer total 19,957 with total balance \$22.19 Million

Gannon Long asked if there was a comparison to last years total.

Kathleen Wasilnak stated that they could work on getting that.

5. New Business

Nominating Committee: Wendy Wanchak

Wendy Wanchak open the floor to Danielle Palladino to introduce herself and take her nomination as chairperson of the board.

Danielle Palladino declined her nomination and stated that per the statutes of the board 16-41B (a) states that “..The Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management and the Commissioners of Social Services and Energy and Environmental Protection, or their designees, shall serve as nonvoting members of the board.” And (c) “The board shall elect a chairperson and a vice-chairperson from among its voting members.”

Deb Polun recommended that the nominating committee get back together and come up with new nominations.

The current member on the committee are Nora Duncan, Brenda Watson, Chris Herb, Danielle Palladino and Wendy Wanchak.

Policy Committee: Wendy Wanchak.

Wendy Wanchak stated that the Policy Subcommittee met on January 31 and consisted of Ruth Swift, Tyra Peluso, Theresa Washington.

The subcommittee discussed the functions of the committee:

1. Identifying possible issues affecting low-income households on which LIEAB can act and make recommendations, including legislative initiatives.
2. Collect information and provide the framework to bring issues before the full board for discussion and vote
3. Assist in determining how LIEAB recommendations could best be directed to facilitate positive outcomes for low-income energy households.

Wendy Wanchak stated that an issue that has been identify is data sharing between DSS and the utilities. The subcommittee wants to collect information from various sources and bring information forward for discussion at that full board.

Wendy Wanchak encouraged those members who want to join the subcommittee to attend the next meeting scheduled for last week of March.

Wendy Wanchak on the behalf of the Policy Committee asked DSS if there is a breakdown of the reallocated LIHEAP monies that remain at the end of the season. How much is returned by the participating utilities versus what money was not spent in first place?

Carlene Taylor: So, what you're looking for is how much funds have been returned by each utility company for the last 3 years to DSS?

Wendy Wanchak: Yes, and what percentage that returned money constitutes? So the money that's returned by the utilities is that 50 percent of the money that DSS finds itself with. Is it 30 percent?

Carlene Taylor stated that it is not a large amount.

Linette Pisani recommended that the committee look at the allocation plans that are submitted and approved by the committees of cognates which contain an estimated amount of refunds.

Gannon Long resubmitted her request to be added to the Policy Committee.

DEEP Presentation: Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP)

DEEP requested to be added to the April Agenda for a presentation on the Weatherization Assistance Program.

Wendy Wanchak approved.

6. Public Comments

None

7. Adjournment

Motion by: Deb Polun

Second by: Nora Duncan

Opposed by: None