

Low Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting

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

1. Call to Order

Chairperson Deb Polun called the meeting to order at 1:35 PM. Remote meeting held via Microsoft Teams.

2. Attendance

Members Present: *Deb Polun, Nora Duncan, Rosemary Lopez, Joy Hollister, Joanne Whistnant, Ruth Swift, Tyra Peluso, Tonya Anderson, Frank Augeri, Jaime Soto, Nicole Lawton, Victoria Hackett, Cassandra Norfleet-Johnson, Danielle Palladino.*

Members Absent: *Chris Herb, Lisa Rosso, Theresa Washington, Kathy Wasilnak,*

Host: *Starley Arias, Claire Sickinger*

Guest: *Jeanne Pitney, Kathy Fay, Nancy J, Brittany Wyman, Linette Pisani, Claire E. Coleman, Kimberly White, Alyson Ayotte, Gannon Long, Susan Mosimann, Peter B. Hadler, Tammy Wilson, Lissette Andino, Angel Battle.*

Joy Hollister announced that she will be leaving the board and introduced Jeanne Pitney as her replacement.

Deb Polun announced new guidance on the meeting structure.

- Only official representatives of an organization listed in the statute is to participate in meetings or chat windows. Unless their identified proxy is in attendance and will be serving as that organization's representative for the meeting.
- There is a public comment section at the beginning and end of each meeting for guest in attendance. These are the only times for non-members to participate in the meeting.

3. Minutes for Approval

Minutes for Wednesday, April 6, 2022

Motion by: Frank Augeri

Second by: Jaime Soto

Abstained: none

Opposed by: none

4. Public Comments

Kathy Fay (Neighborhood Housing Services – I Heart My Home) stated that there have been data sharing issues with the community action agencies even after the customer has authorized consent.

Deb Polun stated that she will follow up with Kathy after the meeting.

5. Committee Updates

Bylaws Committee:

Deb Polun stated that the board needs to establish a bylaw committee. There have been changes in board representation as a result of HB 5342 now Public Act 22 -105. Deb requested volunteers.

Joanne Whistnant, Ruth Swift, Nora Duncan, and Deb Polun volunteered. The committee will meet a few times in before the August meeting.

Nora stated that she would coordinate with the team for the first meeting.

LIHEAP Allocation Committee:

Joy Hollister stated that the recommendations are consistent with recommendations made in the past. The structure of the document has changed, with the recommendations at the beginning of the document and items that the committee has asked to be continued at the end.

Deb Polun requested that Joy go over the recommendation on verbiage around “bioheat”

Joy stated that the recommendation to use the term “bioheat” for home heating oil was made by a subcommittee member. DEEP with support from EOE are recommending that the subcommittee decline to adopt the term as a generic term for home heating oil.

Deb stated that due to Chris Herb not being present and the statute not requiring a term change, the group should side with DEEP and EOE.

Tyra Peluso asked if there was a way to submit the “Recommendations to Utility Companies” section to the PURA proceeding at a later date.

Peter Hadler (DSS) expressed concern for the recommendation that DSS respond in writing to the all the various elements of the “Recommendations to Department of Social Services (DSS)” section due to limited resources, capacity, and time frame. Peter highlighted the practice of DSS walking through the allocation plan with the board after it has been developed. Suggesting that this practice be continued.

Peter Hadler spoke about DSS’ actions to improve the application process for clients. Providing some information on the online interface that is being used for LIHEAP and the plans to advance the technology.

Claire Coleman (Consumer Council) stated that great strides have been made with DSS and the utilities on figuring out the legal framework on how data sharing could work. Peter Hadler added that there has been progress. Stating that they are on the cusp of finalizing the process and understanding what fields get exchanged and with what entities.

Deb Polun in response to Peter about reporting to the board that DSS provide a document detailing the consideration and reasoning for not including recommendations. Asked if anyone on the board thought that the line should be removed.

Nora Duncan asked if instead of reporting, could the consideration and reasoning for not including recommendations be a part of the testimony to the General Assembly.

Kim White stated that if the reporting could not be done then it should be a part of the testimony to the General Assembly.

Daniel Palladino reminded the group on the August 1 deadline for the submission of the allocation plan.

Victoria Hackett spoke on the recommendation DEEP made on not using the term “bioheat” to describe home heating oil. Stating that the recommendation was made because there is no known amount of how much biodiesel is blended with home heating oil.

The board proceeded to discuss the recommendations and a motion to:

- Remove the reference to bioheat for home heating oil.
- To add verbiage on the LIHEAP paper and online application around any reference to the W1E.
- Recommending that DSS inform the board at the August 3 meeting of any recommendations that were or were not accepted into the plan and consider including in their testimony any references to items that were or were not excepted.

Motion by: Ruth Swift

Second by: Nora Duncan

Abstained: none

Opposed by: none

6. Old Business/ Program Updates

LIHEAP/CEAP Update: Cassandra Norfleet-Johnson & Linette Pisani

Application Data Overview August 2, 2021 - May 21, 2022

- Year to Date Total: 97,137 applications taken
 - 81013 Applications approved (combined fuel/utility/rental)
 - 14,076 Applications denied.
 - 24,010 in Crisis Assistance
 - 14,773 in Safety Net
 - Overall approval rate of 85 percent.

Linette Pisani stated that last year a supplemental payment towards electric bill for eligible households was made last year because the cooling assistance benefit was not in place. About 70,000 households were eligible for energy assistance. The cooling assistance program will start this year and it is anticipated that every eligible household from the past year will receive the cooling benefit.

Kimberly White had a question on the timing of the disbursement stating that recent customers had received their benefits.

Cassandra Norfleet-Johnson stated that there is one utility vendor that is still outstanding, and all the rest have received their first round of payments.

Operation Fuel Update: Tonya Anderson

Winter 21 -Spring 22 Program Season

- 8,936 applicants for the season
- A significant increase in the utility numbers.
 - Summer/Fall total 2,101
 - Winter/Spring total 8,936
- The 22-23 Summer/Fall season starts July 11.
- At the start of the season, we are transitioning to our new software vendor, Hancock.

Matching Payment Program Update:

Eversource Program Updates 2022: Joanne Whistnant

- *New Start Forgiveness January 1 – April 30*
 - *12,707 customers for 2022 in comparison to 9,788 customers in 2021, a difference of 2,919.*
- *Matching Payment Program (MPP) as of March 31, 2022*
 - *14,193 electric customers*
 - *14,139 gas customers*
 - *Total of 28,332*
- *Arrearage Forgiveness Program*
 - *April 2022 total 57,004*
 - *April 2021 total 41,263*
 - *Difference of 15,741*

Avangrid Program Update 2022: Jaime Soto

- *Matching Payment Program April 2022*
 - *UI had 3,682 customers with a balance of \$6,184,354*
 - *CNG almost 12,215 customers with a balance of \$13.4 million*
 - *SGC had a little over 15,000 customers with a balance of \$17.2 million*
 - *Overall total about 31,000 customers with a balance of \$36.8 million*
 - *April 2021 had about 2,300 customers with a balance of \$23.5 million*
- *Forgiveness Program MaPP*
 - *UI had a little over 6,000 customers with a balance of \$12 million*
 - *The program is being rebranded and will be known as the “Bill Forgiveness Program”*
- *COVID -19 Active Payment Plan*
 - *Overall total of about 21,000 customers with a balance of \$25.2 million*
 - *2021 comparison of 13,000 customers with a balance of \$12.5 million*
- *Phase one: MPP*
 - *CNG had 2,900 customers that were matched with totals of about \$1.7 million*
 - *SCG had 3,400 customers that were matched with totals of about \$1.8 million*

- *UI had 1,200 customers that were matched with totals of about \$850,000*
- *Overall total of 7,600 customers with \$2.6 million matched.*

7. Docket and Legislative Update: Nora Duncan

HB 5342: An Act Concerning Membership of the Low-Income Energy Advisory Board.

- Now called public act 22105.
- Expands the boards voting members to include:
 - Two representatives from water as designated by CWA
 - The Executive Directors of the Connecticut Fair Housing Coalition, the Connecticut Center for Children Advocacy, and the Connecticut Green Building Council.
 - One extra member from a Community Action Agency.
- Law is effective July 1, 2022.

Nora Duncan will be working on contacting the respective agencies for their designees. Deb Polun introduced Angel Battle as the additional representative of the Alliance for Community Empowerment.

8. New Business

Key Dates and Responsibilities: Deb Polun

Deb Polun asked for OPM and DSS to share information about key dates for application reviews, comments and recommendations needed from the board.

Nora Duncan stated that she would follow up with DEEP on their key dates.

9. Public Comments

Deb Polun reminded the board of the next meeting dates. The October meeting was moved to the second Wednesday of the month.

10. Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn the meeting

Motion by: Joanne Whistnant

Second by: Jaime Soto

No opposition

Meeting adjourned at 2:58 PM.

Next meeting is scheduled for August 3, 2022, via Microsoft Teams.