

Low-Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting
Wednesday, October 3, 2012
1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Room 410, State Capitol, Hartford, CT

Members/Designees: Anne Foley (Chair), Shirley Bergert, Laura Gonzalez, Edith Karsky, Taren O'Connor, Kate Quigley, Pat Wrice, Joanne Balaschak, Carlene Taylor, Robert Norton, Nora Duncan, Kerri Kemp, Joy Hollister, and Michael Coyle.

Others: Janet Edwards, Caty Patton, and Tom O'Brien.

Agenda Item/Action

Welcome: The meeting was convened at 1:30p.m. Chairperson Foley introduced a new Board member, Connecticut AARP State Director Nora Duncan, who has been named AARP's designee representative to LIEAB, filling the position formerly held by David Thomas. Afterwards, all attendees introduced themselves.

Approve Minutes of the August 13, 2012 Meeting: No Board meeting was held in September. Thus, approval of the August 13, 2012 Board minutes was ripe for discussion. Edith Karsky suggested amending the August 13th minutes to reflect that Nora Duncan, along with Pat Wrice, was mentioned as a potential Chairperson during dialogue regarding election of 2012-2013 Board leadership. Also, Shirley Bergert noted that a question by Ms. Karsky regarding a designee serving as Vice-Chair arose, but was not reflected in the draft minutes. Mike Coyle confirmed he would so modify the draft minutes, which was followed by a motion from Laura Gonzalez to accept the minutes with those two minor corrections. The motion was seconded by Shirley Bergert, and the vote thereon was unanimously in favor.

Update: Focus then turned to election of a new Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson. Shirley Bergert nominated Lindsay Parke as Chairperson and Joy Hollister as Vice-Chairperson. However, as no second to that proposal was forthcoming, no further action was taken. Edith Karsky subsequently nominated Pat Wrice as Chairperson and Nora Duncan as Vice-Chairperson. Laura Gonzalez questioned whether nominations for officers could be considered separately rather than jointly (e.g., one Board vote for a duly proposed Chairperson, with a separate vote for a duly proposed Vice-Chairperson). Chairperson Foley commented that such an approach was not precluded by enabling legislation, and in the absence of dissenting viewpoints, concluded that it was acceptable. In light of that finding, Ms. Karsky withdrew her original motion, and immediately moved to nominate

Pat Wrice for Chairperson, clarifying that motion to also reflect Ms. Wrice's interest in a one-year term, which motion was duly seconded. The subsequent vote was unanimously in favor with no abstentions, and Ms. Wrice affirmed her acceptance of the nomination.

The next agenda item was the Vice Chairperson vote. Ms. Bergert moved to nominate Joy Hollister, which was seconded by Laura Gonzalez. Chairperson Foley asked Ms. Bergert for any comment on her nomination, to which she replied that Ms. Hollister's insight into board-related activities and related professional experience would serve as an asset for the interest of the Board. Ms. Hollister thanked the group for its endorsement, and commented that, as a member on the 'front-line,' she has firsthand experience with clients and arising issues, and is thus able to bring them forward in a timely and constructive manner. She closed by stating that she wants the best for the group looks forward to the opportunity to work more closely with Pat Wrice.

Chairperson Foley opened a discussion regarding the role of Vice-Chairperson. Shirley Bergert noted that the Vice-Chair's role should include working with the Chair to keep meetings regular, serve as the Chair's back-up, assist in Board leadership and keep the Board on task to fulfill its statutory requirements. Chairperson Foley confirmed her understanding that the Vice-Chair would be available to facilitate the meetings in the absence of the Chair and work in whatever capacity deemed necessary by the Chair.

Chairperson Foley then issued a call for any further Vice-Chair nominations, to which Edith Karsky nominated Nora Duncan. She supported the nomination by noting seniors comprise 30% or more of the caseload within the Board's purview, and those numbers are increasing. She emphasized that her nomination was not a reflection on Ms. Hollister's suitability as Vice-Chair, but that Ms. Duncan's qualifications present the Board with an opportunity to take advantage of a strategic asset.

Laura Gonzalez then spoke in support of the Ms. Hollister's nomination. Ms. Gonzalez pointed out the value that Ms. Hollister has brought to the Board over the years, with regard to real world experiences of children and seniors in particular. She added that the heartfelt insight Ms. Hollister has shared has been helpful to the Board's utility representatives in responding to legislative issues.

Pat Wrice then spoke on the nominations, noting the increasingly key demographic that seniors fill. Shirley Bergert then applauded Nora Duncan's willingness to take on a Board leadership role, but noted that her brief tenure on the Board gave her very little Board-related experience upon which to draw. Ms. Bergert also made favorable comments on Ms. Hollister's suitability to be Vice-Chair, noting that she might be the better candidate at this time owing to her Board service experience and understanding of Board duties.

Edith Karsky asked for clarification regarding Board members eligible to vote, to which Chairperson Foley recited voting and non-voting members as described in recent Board-related legislation (Sec. 167 of PA 12-2 from the June 2012 Special Session).

Discussion then ensued regarding proxy voting rights. After some discussion, Chairperson Foley affirmed that Ms. Gonzalez could act as a proxy for the other two UIL representatives, in support of which Ms. Gonzalez had produced written consent. After discussion, Edith Karsky withdrew her Vice-Chair nomination for Ms. Duncan, expressed her appreciation her for agreeing to serve on the Board, and expressed her hope that she might agree to a similar nomination in the future.

The Board went on to vote unanimously to accept the nomination of Joy Hollister as Vice-Chairperson. As discussed, Chairperson Foley confirmed that the Vice-Chair term would run concurrently with the Chair Position, for a one-year term.

Update: FFY13 LIHEAP Plan:

Chairperson Foley noted that Shirley Bergert distributed information that the FFY13 plan was passed unanimously by the legislative committee of cognizance. She stated that an oil dealer working group was proposed at a recent LIHEAP legislative hearing, to consider issues such as late payment, caseload, and others. The working group is likely to evolve over time, possibly as soon as November-to-December, and begin to meet perhaps as soon as early 2013. Chairperson Foley suggested that this may present an opportunity for the Board to consider and weigh in on some or all of the concerns aired by the oil dealer representatives.

Edith Karsky suggested that it is worthwhile for a working group to review such matters, but expressed concern that limited funding and the potential for a severe winter presented unique Program challenges. She also expressed hope that OPM and DSS would be closely involved with the working group.

Chairperson Foley then reported on OPM Secretary Ben Barnes' testimony regarding LIHEAP block grant funding and the potential consequences of sequestration. Chairperson Foley stressed that these circumstances will require the Board to be actively engaged in providing policymaker input on how Federal cuts might impact programs. She also suggested that the potential for budgetary disruption at the Federal level is very real, and likely to play out after the national elections.

Update on the Status of Program Intake:

DSS's Tom O'Brien mentioned that LIHEAP needs to request funding quarterly, and that there is an element of forecast timing and strategy involved in this effort (e.g., 85% in 1st quarter, 15% in 2Q, 0% in 3Q and 4Q). Mr. O'Brien presented a handout of with a snapshot of caseload and other key data.

Next Steps:

The next Board meeting is scheduled for November 7th, at 1:30 p.m., at DEEP, Ten Franklin Square, New Britain.

Outgoing Chairperson Foley closed by thanking the Board for the opportunity and privilege to serve, and graciously extended her best wishes to fellow Board members. She then congratulated the incoming Chair and Vice-Chair, and thanked them for volunteering to serve in a leadership capacity. Ms. Foley thanked the Board as a whole for the passion, knowledge, and hard work they put forth during her tenure. She noted that OPM would have an ongoing presence on the Board, but that designation was still under review. Shirley Bergert thanked Chairperson Foley personally and on behalf of the Board for her distinguished leadership in serving the Board, after which the meeting was adjourned.