

Low-Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting

Wednesday, December 5, 2012

1:38 p.m. – 2:40 p.m.

1st Floor Hearing Room – DEEP

10 Franklin Square, New Britain, CT. 06051

Members/Designees: Pat Wrice, Shirley Bergert, Laura Gonzalez, Edith Karsky, Taren O'Connor, Kate Quigley, Robert Norton, Eddie Swift, James McNally, Frank Augeri, Michael Coyle, Carlene Taylor and Joy Hollister.

Others: Janet Edwards, Tom O'Brien, Dino Pascua and Gail Lucchina.

Agenda/Item/Action

Welcome: The meeting was convened at 1:38 p.m. by Chairperson Wrice.

Approve Minutes of the October 3, 2012 Meeting: Chairperson Wrice welcomed everyone and invited members to approve minutes for October's meeting. Michael Coyle motioned to approve minutes and it was seconded by Shirley Bergert.

FFY 2013 LIHEAP Update:

Tom O'Brien from Dept. of Social Services gave this update. Tom performed an analysis of this year's caseload and compared it to last year's by each agency fuel type - noting a decrease in the number of deliverable fuel clients. However, on the oil side statistics are near last year's figures with only a few hundred more clients approved to date. On the natural gas side there were 5,800 last year but 10,800 this year, which - Tom cautioned - does not imply that a doubling of caseload should be expected at the end of the year. Discussion ensued regarding potential causes for the disparate figures but, overall, figures are estimated to be on pace with what would be typically be expected this time of the program year.

A handout was then discussed comparing data from the CAAs in terms of CEAP and CHAP, with a more detailed update expected in in approximately two months. Trends indicate approximately \$88.27M in LIHEAP block Grant funding will be available, but the total is still in question based in part on fiscal debates in Washington, and may be reduced. However, there is a continuing resolution to carry things through to March 29, 2013.

The first funding payment (\$72.4M) was received from the Federal government, which exceeds the \$67.6M expected. It is estimated that if sequestration does occur, funds are sufficient to meet the 2011 caseload. 85% of the funding was requested for the first quarter and 15% for the second quarter insure timely funding receipt. However, the second payment may become an issue owing to the looming sequestration issue. Approximately \$5.4M has been spent so far.

Referring to Application data, as of December 3rd almost 60,000 applications have been received, with approvals/denials reflected to date. Over 14,000 households have gone into the Crisis Assistance portion of the program and one household has gone into the Safety Net Assistance now that fuel deliveries have begun. Totals are running 13% ahead of last year, which was expected because of unique circumstances last year. However, it was expected that there would be a 15% drop from 2011, but numbers are currently 18% below that figure and each week appear to be falling further back. No likely cause for the dropoff in applications was identified, but may be attributable in part to the comparatively mild weather thus far into the heating season.

DSS reports sufficient funding to do an initial round of utility payments which would occur earlier than in recent program years. Currently, there is \$8.2M in utility approval. Also, most of the vendors' approvals are in from the utility companies, but still waiting for a few vendors' approvals/agreements to make payments. The first round of money is expected to go out to the CAAs the week before the Christmas Holiday, so they can begin to batch-up the funds. Information requests were sent to everyone for the leveraging accounts, but not all reports are yet in. It is not certain whether or not the pot of money for Leveraging is available this year because the Federal government has not yet asked any State to file. Tom explained that "leveraging" in this context reflects money given to states by the federal government for LIHEAP purposes - for every dollar of non-Federal assistance provided to low income households for energy assistance programs (e.g., Matching Payment Programs, Operation Fuel, the \$ on the fixed margin pricing programs for oil customers, and WRAP). Approximately \$400,000 is received for every \$20 million filed by the state. Apparently, HHS is facing some challenges regarding timing of responses, so there is still time to return leverage information.

Shirley Bergert had a question regarding whether healthy homes\$, HES-IE\$, and RGGI\$ were being considered for leveraging purposes, and indicated she would follow up with Carlene Taylor and Tom on that issue.

Regarding oil prices, Tom O'Brien mentioned that prices were running .10 per gallon more than last year this time, but the price recently fell to within .01 cent of last year.

The oil companies that agreed to participate with DSS and its pricing structure total 355 so far. Last year there were 365 who signed up; it's estimated that approximately the same number will sign up this year.

Utility Matching Payment Program Updates:

Yankee Gas' Eddie Swift gave an update. At Northeast Utilities, 23,944 customers were auto-enrolled in matching payments program as of November 1st. As of the end of November, there were 996 new enrollments. The total number of customers currently enrolled in MPP program is 24,940. To date, 669 "below budget" worksheets have been received and these are still being processed. The total account balance for these customers is \$4.4 million for CL&P and \$934K for Yankee Gas.

Laura Gonzalez of United Illuminating also provided an update. UI reports it has auto-enrolled 2,397 customers for this program year, and an additional 79 customers was enrolled manually, for a total enrollment of 2,476 as of the end of November. This figure is higher than last year's.

Eddie Swift followed up with an update regarding Below Budget Worksheets. He reports CL&P is currently updating the Memorandum of Understanding that should be ready in a few weeks. He suggested that all parties continue to do business-as-usual under the current contract terms.

Tom O'Brien mentioned that several agencies have not done anything this year with the Below Budget Worksheet. Perhaps they are assuming that because they do not have a new contract or a new agreement with NU that they are not supposed to do the Below Budget Worksheet, but Tom noted that they still have access to the portals and the worksheet.

James McNally of CNG/SCG provided an update, noting that CNG auto-enrolled 15,073, coupled with 1,558 new enrollments, yielding a total enrollment of 16,631. SCG auto-enrolled 13,232 (3,841 new enrollments), for a total enrollment of 17,073. The CNG/SCG total is thus 33,704.

Operation Fuel Update:

Chairperson Wrice provided an Operation Fuel update, stating that it ran a limited summer program this past summer (August-October), during which approximately \$500K was given out in energy assistance, mostly for secondary heat and utilities. There were 1,500 households served, including funds from a carry forward CL&P donation and some from a State grant. Pat distributed a handout highlighting fuel banks' participation in the summer program.

Last year, Operation Fuel was given a State grant for \$1.1M, 10% of which was used for admin. Chairperson Wrice replied to a question, identifying the general fund as the source of the funds. There was subsequent discussion regarding the status of the Petroleum Violation Escrow account to which Mike Coyle provided an update. Mike reported that the \$312K balance is being repurposed to backfill HES deliverable fuel homes, and that PY12-13 should mark the end of this longstanding funding stream.

Chairperson Wrice reported that for 2011-1012, Operation Fuel gave out energy assistance from a number of sources totaling \$2.3M, and benefitting 5,772 households. The add-a-dollar program received took in \$394,610 last year, similar to the prior year. The shareholder match from CL&P and UI totaled \$121,678, yielding \$516,288.

Chairperson Wrice mentioned that more than five years have passed since legislation was enacted regarding facilitation of utility customer donation to Operation Fuel, and that donations should not be limited to a dollar. However, Operation Fuel reports that there are customers that CNG used to allow to donate more than a dollar who reportedly can no longer do so because of an automatic deduction default. It was noted that Colorado has a method of collecting funds that Operation Fuel would like to emulate in Connecticut. Chairperson Wrice believes the issue may be mechanical, but can only be resolved by the participating utilities. Operation Fuel has been meeting with NU to resolve the issue, but does not have the staffing to properly address this and other related issues. The utility company representatives pledged their ongoing support to consider this issue and how it may impact Operation Fuel donations.

Other Issues:

Shirley Bergert brought up several issues: low-income clients being turn away by energy assistance because their utilities have been terminated, and undocumented clients with citizen

children and/or partners being asked to produce social security numbers before assistance would be considered. Regarding the first issue, DSS' Tom O'Brien promised to send out a reminder to agencies that terminated clients seeking energy assistance should not be turned away, and should be assisted in achieving serve restoration during the moratorium period. The citizenship issue is a worker training issue as noted by several attendees. Tom proposed to research the issue in more detail.

Shirley also suggested adding a regularly recurring item to the agenda: "Energy Assistance Administrative issues," which was generally agreed to be acceptable (without formal vote).

Joy Hollister asked Tom for clarification on the Zero Income Form, and what specific details were required. She also questioned whether an applicant needed a rent receipt or lease if they heat by oil. Tom stated that if a customer's heat is not included in his rent, it would not be a requirement that he provide verification of monthly rent or mortgage to receive energy assistance. Lastly, Tom confirmed that the telephone number for Energy Assistant hotline remains 1-800-842-1132.

Operation Fuel reported it will be issuing a release on an Energy Affordability study it commissioned.

Next Steps:

The meeting adjourned at 2:36 p.m. The next Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 2, 2013, at 1:30 p.m., at DEEP, Ten Franklin Square, New Britain.