

Low-Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting

Wednesday, February 6, 2013

1:35 p.m. – 2:55 p.m.

HRA/Human Resources Agency

180 Clinton Street, New Britain, CT 06053

**Members/Designees:** Pat Wrice, Joy Hollister, Frank Augeri, Taren O'Connor, Veronica Gomez, Robert Norton, Michael Coyle, Eddie Swift, Nora Duncan, Edith Karsky, Kate Quigley, Laura Gonzalez, and James McNally.

**Others:** Janet Edwards, Tom O'Brien, Dino Pascua, Gail Lucchina, Kelley Jacobson, Joanne Balaschak, and Wendy Wanchak.

**Agenda/Item/Action**

**Welcome:** The meeting was convened at 1:35 p.m. by Chairperson Pat Wrice.

**Approve Minutes of the January 2, 2013 meeting:** Chairperson Wrice welcomed everyone, and made a motion for acceptance of the January 2nd minutes which was duly seconded and unanimously approved.

**2013 LIHEAP Update:** DSS's Tom O'Brien provided an update, accompanied by handout materials. The handout described in snapshot format the status of CEAP and CHAP by funding source, expenditures, estimated balance, application data by CAP, and offered a year-to-year caseload comparison by CAP and at the State level. DSS also provided a breakout chart of eligible clients by fuel type.

Generally, it appears that oil customer caseload is down, while gas and electric are up across the board. Tom noted this is somewhat unusual since oil prices are slightly higher.

Referring to the handout on 2012/2013 CEAP, it is anticipated that sequestration will occur, thus, the \$88.3M estimated program may be subject to change post sequestration for LIHEAP and other programs. Tom noted the difficulty of estimating the potential impact. CT is better situated than some of its peers due to the DSS decision to "front load" (85%) its LIHEAP \$ request.

Since the estimated balance after all expenditures is \$31M, sequestration *might* reduce this balance by about \$7M or \$8M. +/- \$3M is spent each week on energy benefits. However, as people begin to exhaust their benefits, there tends to be a decline in numbers beginning in February and continuing to the March 15<sup>th</sup> deadline for ordering fuel. Though there is a possibility of sequestration funding loss, there are sufficient funds to carry the program to the end of the current heating season. If the total balance is received, some portion could be rolled over to the next program year (up to 10%, but not likely this year).

Sequester would occur March 1<sup>st</sup> with the continuing resolution sunseting March 27th.

Overall, there is a 10-15% decline in CT participants compared to the record-setting participation two years ago. The '12-13 budget was created with those numbers in mind, but also taking looming sequestration into consideration.

All vendor agreements are reported to be in place, and utility payments have been made. Everyone is approved to December 24<sup>th</sup>, except two utility companies whose vendor agreement was not received until recently. Following a recent round of payment processing, all agencies have funds to cover commitments up to February 1<sup>st</sup>. The first round of payment was \$11M; the recent round \$6M. An email update will be sent to agencies re: the payment amount and payout cost for the current round.

Weekly email updates will continue to be sent to the utilities informing each of payment/amount sent out and how much funds they should be expecting from each and when.

**Utility Matching Payment Program Updates:** CNG's James McNally provided an update, noting total enrollment figures for CNG (19,722 customers enrolled), and SCG (21,619 customers enrolled). These figures are near the maximum for each company. No below budget customer figures were available.

UI's Laura Gonzalez provided an update, noting 2,600 customers enrolled to date. UI is working with the CAPs to get commitments automatically loaded for the three UIL companies, which will be posted once completed. No numbers for below budget customers are available at this time.

Eddie Swift provided updates for CL&P and Yankee: CL&P has 14,137 enrolled; Yankee Gas 14,658, for a total of 28,795 (with 3,866 "below budget" customer submittals: CL&P 2,462/Yankee 1,404).

Edith Karsky asked the utility representatives how these figures compared to prior years. Most agreed the numbers are on par with recent years, although Vice Chair Hollister noted the oil client decrease, and utility customer increase, contrasted somewhat with the steady number of MPP customers.

**Operation Fuel Update:** Chairperson Wrice provided an update/handout depicting a comprehensive program overview for PY12-13.

**Energy Assistance Administrative Issues:** No administrative issues were proposed for discussion, but there was discussion regarding the need of this agenda item. Mike Coyle confirmed he would hold it in reserve if/when the need for such discussion arose. Mike also urged members to submit to him prior to the next meeting any item that might be queued up for discussion, so that Board might have a chance to reflect on, or research such issues beforehand.

Mike Coyle gave an update of the status of the DOE Weatherization Assistance Program for the Board's consideration. Mike noted that no Funding Announcement had yet been issued by DOE, which typically would occur at/by this time of year. Mike explained that with the Continuing Resolution and sequestration looming in the background, funding for this year may be delayed, and would probably be less than historic levels. DEEP plans to continue the program with only very minor programmatic changes to reflect recent DOE guidance, and Mike indicated he would soon forward to the Board for comment materials that DEEP had drafted in anticipation of this year's application to DOE.

**NEXT STEPS:** Tom O'Brien proposed that the Board begin thinking actively about developing next year's LIHEAP program prior to completion of the draft for funding. Chairperson Wrice suggested a sub-committee be formed. Several members volunteered to participate and prepare a draft for the March meeting. volunteers included Eddie Swift, Joanne Balaschak, Taren O'Connor, Veronica Gomez, Robert Norton, and Joy Hollister.

A general discussion ensued regarding the status of the Low Income Discount Rate proceeding before PURA, and the Weatherization Assistance Program now administered by DEEP for which Mike Coyle provided an overview and responded to questions.

There was also discussion regarding development of a small working group to review MPP letter language. A sidebar discussion ensued, the results of which will be updated at the March meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 2:55 p.m. The next Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 6, 2013, at HRA in New Britain.