

Low-Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting

Wednesday, January 2, 2013

1:45 p.m. – 2:40 p.m.

1st Floor Hearing Room – DEEP

10 Franklin Square, New Britain, CT 06051

Members/Designees: Joy Hollister, Frank Augeri, Taren O'Connor, Robert Norton, Michael Coyle, Eddie Swift, Nora Duncan, and Kate Quigley.

Others: Janet Edwards, Tom O'Brien, Veronica Gomez, Dino Pascua, Gail Lucchina, Caty McDermott, Joanne Balaschak, and Rhonda Evans.

Agenda/Item/Action

Welcome: The meeting was convened at 1:45 p.m. by Vice-Chairperson Joy Hollister.

Approve Minutes of the December 5, 2012 meeting: Vice-Chair Hollister welcomed everyone and invited member comment on the draft minutes from December's meeting. The minutes were subsequently accepted as proposed by unanimous vote.

FFY 2013 LIHEAP Update:

Tom O'Brien from Dept. of Social Services provided a LIHEAP update. Tom noted that ongoing sequestration issues would likely be passed on to the forthcoming 113rd Congress, thus delaying action on many Federal spending issues. It is anticipated that sequestration-related issues may not be addressed until March 2013, or later.

Tom supplied a handout documenting LIHEAP Application Data and depicting year-to-year caseload comparisons for FFY 2011, 2012 and 2013. The FFY 2013 program is based on the activity of FFY 11. Participation is running +/- 12-15% higher than last year, but given the uniqueness of certain data last year, the numbers appear to be within expectations.

Tom reports that DSS continues to reach out to Health & Human Services, but awaits confirmation regarding the second quarter payment, which is due within the next week. Tom explained that Connecticut structured its LIHEAP fund cash requests in two parts - 85% in the first program quarter and 15% in the second program quarter. It is now the second (15%) payment for which DSS awaits confirmation, with sequestration in the background.

Referring to handout on 2012/2013 CEAP and CHAP – the program budget is estimated to be \$88.3M, assuming sequestration threats are resolved and return of issued is not required. DSS reports that approximately \$44M has been spent to date, or roughly 1/2, which is in keeping with past experience.

This morning (1/2/13), the Community Action Agencies received LIHEAP funds from DSS, and Tom was told that utility payments can begin to be processed. Therefore, \$11.3M will be going out to the utility

companies for the first round of utility payments (to all approved utility-heated households). Those eligible are approved up-to December 24th, and can make payments except for two utilities that have not returned their vendor agreement to DSS (attempts being made to resolve).

Regarding leveraging accounts – reportedly there are still difficulties in receiving this information from the utilities. Therefore, Tom inquired from DEEP and PURA attendees if it was possible for PURA to retrieve Matching Payment Program information from Agency records, including participating customer counts and other programmatic and financial data. Mike Coyle and Frank Augeri agreed to investigate and report to DSS off-line.

Tom thanked Northeast Utilities for submitting customer refunds back to DSs, but noted no such reimbursement from the UIL companies. Tom will follow-up with UI/CNG and SCG companies to ascertain the underlying reasons for the delay. For the current fiscal year, DSS confirms receipt of 121 checks totaling \$232,193.35. These funds go back into paying clients' accounts in the Energy Assistance Program. Tom noted that two years ago - when funds ran low - such customer refunds from the NU companies proved valuable in paying these bills.

While noting the absence of oil distributor representatives at this and recent meetings, DSS related that oil pricing for November and December - compared with like periods last year - show prices scaling up, yielding fewer gallons/program dollar (e.g., up approximately 12 cents or so for December).

Tom offered to continue sending out email confirmations to the utility companies (as he did last year) for planning purposes once payments go out to the CAAs.

Utility Matching Payment Program Updates:

Eddie Swift of Northeast Utilities provided an update, stating as of December that the matching payment program added 1,197 customers, bringing the NU total enrolled count to 26,137. Eddie plans to provide budget and breakdown details at the next meeting.

Operation Fuel Update:

No report.

Energy Assistance Administrative Issues:

It was discussed and agreed that "utility participation issues" could be redacted from the regularly recurring LIEAB agenda outline.

Eddie Swift then asked for clarification of aliens and non-qualified immigrants applying for - and reportedly being denied in some instances - assistance. Tom O'Brien related that a household of one, wherein the individual is undocumented, would not qualify for LIHEAP assistance. On the other hand, a household with a mix of citizens and undocumented members might be eligible, provided that the income of the undocumented household members was counted towards household energy assistance eligibility.

Joy Hollister mentioned that she sent out an email to CLASS members informing them of the above policy and requesting that they contact her if additional information was needed or if questions arose.

General discussion ensued regarding staffing levels at various CAP intake sites.

LIEAB Meeting Venue- AARP's Nora Duncan questioned the rationale for having LIEAB meetings at a site such as DEEP when parking costs may be off putting to members of the public who might otherwise attend. Discussion followed during which several members expressed dissatisfaction with the ongoing prospect of unreimbursed parking costs incurred while attending LIEAB meetings.

Mike Coyle noted that with the 2012 change in law transferring LIEAB admin responsibilities to DEEP, it was agreed that DEEP's offices offered benefits to the Board, such as call-in capability, recording capabilities meetings, and hearing rooms otherwise designed to facilitate such meetings. following discussion it was suggested consideration be given to moving future meetings to another site, with the HRA/CAFCA New Britain site at 180 Clinton Street to be given particular consideration. Joy indicated she would follow up with LIEAB Chair Pat Wrice and CAFCA Executive Director Edith Karsky.

Next Steps:

The meeting adjourned at 2:40 p.m. The next Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 6, 2013, at 1:30 p.m. The venue will be announced at a later date.

**Note: On January 14, 2013, Chairperson Wrice emailed DEEP to announce that the next LIEAB meeting will be held at HRA's office of New Britain. It is anticipated that future LIEAB meetings will convene there as well.*