

Minutes
Low-Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting
Wednesday, October 2, 2013
HRA/Human Resources Agency
180 Clinton Street, New Britain, CT

Members/Designees: Pat Wrice (Operation Fuel) (Chairperson), Joy Hollister (Town of Cromwell/CLASS) (Vice-Chairperson), Frank Augeri (PURA), Joan Balaschak (NOI/CAFCA), Nora Duncan (AARP), Rhonda Evans (CAFCA), Veronica Gomez (CL&P), Laura Gonzalez (UI), Edith Karsky (CAFCA), Taren O'Connor (OCC), Kate Quigley (UWCT/2-1-1), Eddie Swift (Yankee Gas), Wendy Wanchak (Connecticut Legal Services)

Others: Chuck Anderson (DSS), David Frascarelli (DSS), Julian Freund (Operation Fuel), Dino Pascua (DEEP/BETP), Kelly Sinko (OPM)

Welcome: The meeting was convened at 1:25 p.m.

Approval of Minutes of the September 4, 2013 meeting: After noting that Kate Quigley was also in attendance of that meeting, Edith Karsky moved for approval of the August 7, 2013 minutes. Kate Quigley seconded. The vote in favor was unanimous.

Two new attendees were introduced: Julian Freund of Operation Fuel, and Kelly Sinko of OPM.

Legislative hearing on block grant appropriations plan: Edith Karsky felt the hearing went really well; no negative comments were heard. The plan was approved. Edith complimented Chuck Anderson and Pat Wrice, in particular, on their testimonies. Chuck noted that it was the first hearing in which he provided testimony. He thanked LIEAB and CAFCA.

FFY 2014 LIHEAP Update: Chuck stated that after the plan was approved, all info was uploaded into the system by that Friday, or Monday at the latest. DSS released its Desk Guide, which would be used to aid individuals who either take or certify applications for CEAP or CHAP in how to best process these applications (Chuck will have DEEP's Deb Morrell email a digital copy of the Desk Guide to persons on her LIEAB email lists). During the ongoing Federal government shutdown, Chuck noted that DSS has carry-forward payments that would provide some measure of a buffer, but those will not go far. Chuck also spoke of a computer program that would be of use re: winter protection, but there are some confidentiality issues that need to be worked out; DSS is looking into providing an opt-out option.

Utility Matching Payment Program Update: Frank Augeri stated that PURA approved the utilities' MPP Plans as submitted.

Operation Fuel Update: Pat Wrice noted that Operation Fuel's summer program has closed. Operation Fuel will reopen for the start of the winter program on December 1, 2013. Pat is working towards getting the Energy Affordability Gas Study released, hopefully before November 1, 2013, but the release date remains uncertain.

LIDR Docket No. 12-07-01 Status Update: Dino Pascua stated that BETP's LIDR Review Report, which was filed in PURA's Docket No. 12-07-01 proceeding, is currently being reviewed by Clare Kindall (Office of the Attorney General) for statutory compliance. Frank Augeri noted that he is part of the PURA staff assigned to this docket, for which a time schedule has yet to be issued. Frank provided a general overview of how such a docket proceeding would likely progress. Frank will have Deb Morrell email a digital copy of BETP's LIDR Final Determination to persons on her LIEAB email lists as a refresher.

Pat asked the LIEAB Board to consider whether it should act as a subcommittee with Operation Fuel and participate in the LIDR proceeding under a general consensus. However, a significant number of Board members were noted to already represent PURA or active participants (the utilities and OCC) in that docket, and would likely be precluded from joining in open discussion as members of the LIEAB Board and/or taking a Board-endorsed position that might be at odds with their own agencies/ companies' positions on this issue. Nora Dunn suggested that this discussion take place outside of the Board meeting, and involve other entities that have an interest in weighing in on this matter. (Tentative plans were made for Operation Fuel to host that discussion on November 8th, 10 am – 12 noon, at AARP's office.)

Utility Security Deposit Requirements: Joy Hollister stated that people are confused about it. Laura Gonzalez indicated that UI primarily takes deposits on non-residential accounts, but will also seek deposits from residential customers who have defaulted on their bills previously. Laura later added that an account's hardship status qualifies that no security deposit is needed. Eddie Swift stated that CL&P and Yankee Gas do not ask for deposits from residential customer accounts coded as hardship. James McNally (via text to Laura) confirmed that SCG and CNG do not ask hardship customers for a security deposit.

Frank Augeri discussed and handed out copies of the state regulation on security deposits required by gas or electric utilities (Conn. Agencies Regs. § 16-262j-1). Wendy Wanchak discussed and handed out copies of relevant state statutes on utility deposits (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 16-262j(a)) and how "hardship case" is defined (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 16-262c(b)(3)(A)). Frank noted that a security deposit would typically amount to 3/12ths of a customer's annual billings. Frank later added that the security deposit regulation also allows for a payment arrangement on the security deposit.

Pat expressed concerned that security deposits would be asked for during warmer months. Joy noted that during the warmer months, a hardship customer whose service is already off would not be asked for a security deposit, *but* will need to pay entire arrearage before service is reconnected. Pat is considering giving Operation Fuel's clients more training on how to better approach their bills. Operation Fuel does not use its monies towards paying security deposits. The increase in security deposit concerns may likely be due to greater enforcement activity by the utilities, which are doing so in conformance with state regulations and statutes.

Veronica Gomez gave a reminder that CL&P holds 4 informational meetings each year that social agencies' employees may find useful. Persons interested in these meetings are urged to contact her for details.

Miscellaneous: Nora reported that during the recent meeting on the proposal to privatize electric rates, she noted that the energy marketers were “not invigorated” by comments expressed during that meeting. Also, as a result of its recent mail-outs, AARP has increased its database of clients that would/could speak out issues that might affect those clients to DEEP, the General Assembly, etc. Nora noted that AARP recently succeeded in getting 400+ persons to contact the Governor’s office to demand an assessment/analysis of the ratepayer impact of the proposed near-doubling of funding for conservation and load management programs (energy efficiency programs).

Next Meeting: Nora motioned to end the meeting and Taren O’Connor seconded. Accordingly, the meeting adjourned at 2:39 p.m. The next LIEAB meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 6, 2013, at 1:30 p.m.