

Low-Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting
Wednesday, June 4, 2014
HRA/Human Resources Agency
180 Clinton Street
New Britain, CT

Members/Designees/Others In Attendance: Alyson Ayotte, PURA, Edith Karsky, CAFCA, Nora Duncan, AARP, Chuck Anderson, DSS, Carlene Taylor, DSS, Joseph Rosenthal, OCC, Gail Lucchina, DEEP, Joy Hollister, CLASS, Joanne Balaschak, New Opportunities, Rhonda Evans, CAFCA, Pat Wrice, Operation Fuel, Kathy Wasilnak, UI, Kelly Sinko. OPM, Kasia, Janek, OPM, Wendy Wanchak, Connecticut Legal Services, Cherlynn Villano, SCG, Dalyn Delgado, CNG, Peter Mizejeski, DEEP, Linda Foreman, DEEP

Welcome: The meeting was convened at 1:35 p.m. Pat Wrice chaired the meeting.

Approval of minutes of May 7, 2014 meeting: It was noted that Laura Gonzalez' name needs to be added to the list of attendees at the May meeting. With that change, Edith approved the minutes and Wendy seconded.

LIHEAP Update: Chuck Anderson distributed handouts that showed an increase of 1.5% over last year. Edith stated that 102,000 households were seen this year. Edith reminded everyone that since 2008 they have seen increase and that prior to the recession they were seeing approximately 80,000 households. The data show a growth in the lowest income households.

Carlene commended CAFCA and Edith seconded that opinion and said they deserve kudos. They serve about approximately 116,000 households and that translates to 250,000 people. Pat said that she would like to formally thank the Community Action Agencies (CAP) and the minutes shall reflect that LIEAB officially recognizes and affirms the outstanding work of the CAP agencies. Wendy moved the motion and Nora seconded.

Chuck advised that some funding is reserved for pending applications from the \$2 million. There will be an administrative reduction for early intakes and the Farm Bill amount will also reduce the carryover to approximately

\$1million - \$1.5 million. Chuck noted that last year the carryover was \$7 million. The good news is that the program did not run out of money.

Chuck stated that this is the time of year he breaks down the data. The trend continues with fewer households using greater amounts of benefits. The breakdown shows the difference between utility and deliverable fuels. The next couple of months will be busy. The Energy Assistance Directors met with DEEP to assure the neediest households get the weatherization assistance they need.

Joy commended Chuck for the seamless transition following Tom's retirement. Carlene, Joanne and Edith agreed. Chuck thanked Tom O'Brien for the training he received.

Carlene reported that there is no NEON update. The Energy Program is over. She stated that 211 has called because people are calling them and stating that they are worried that there will not be a program next year. Carlene stated that people are now being reassured that there will be a program next year.

It was reported that the National Energy and Affordability Coalition will urge Congress to increase LIHEAP funding. Pat directed members to LIHEAP.org. Pat wants members to support this effort. They hold a mobilization day that Op Fuel typically participates in. Pat also mentioned that they are currently seeking to hire an Executive Director.

Operation Fuel: Pat noted that they are still seeing a few stragglers coming in. She advised the Board that Op Fuel is now in its new location on Charter Oak Square and she stated that she would like to host the August LIEAB meeting at this new location. The goal for Charter Oak Square is to house only nonprofit organizations.

Operation Fuel's program is closed for this fiscal year. The summer program is opening July 21st and the winter program will commence December 1st. Pat reported that \$2.5 million was allocated to 5,179 households. Op Fuel did not fund people that had received safety net benefits. This was a tough decision but a necessary one. The fuel banks had to do juggling and they did not have the resources. Pat stated that she did a daily monitoring of expenditures to keep the program going up until

June 2nd. Pat commended her staff for their efforts. Pat further stated that Op Fuel is an emergency service that fills in the gap in LIHEAP funding.

According to Pat, the summer program will have approximately \$1 million to disburse. Customers must have made at least one good faith payment during the moratorium. Customers can receive up to \$500 on their bill. They do not need a shut off notice but must be late in payment. Edith asked how people learn of the program and Pat stated that they do a media campaign and 211 and the utilities inform people. The qualifying percentage of income is 0-60% of state median. If they got a LIHEAP benefit they would be eligible but if they got Operation Fuel benefit this winter they would not be eligible for one year. The program does not pay for oil bills in the summer.

Utility Matching Payment: UI, SCG and CNG took the difficult winter into consideration. They, therefore, considered three budget payments as successful instead of the previous requirement of five or six payments. Edith stated that LIEAB should support and recommend that CL&P should do the same thing. Joanne stated that it is a very confusing program, particularly for people that begin in November. UI reports a 48% success rate and CNG reports 44% and SCG reports 38% success. Pat asked for a three year comparison of the program's success rates and Kathy Wasilnak said she would provide this information. The below budgets were discussed and it was explained that below budgets are those customers that have a budget payment and could not afford it so it was lowered.

Joy offered that LIEAB should thank UI and Pat said it should be made a motion for CL&P to do the same change to their MPP program. The group formally thanked the UIL companies and stated that other companies should follow their lead.

WAP Update: Peter reported that the program year (PY) 2013 amount was \$500,000 and the PY 2014 amount is \$1 million. This is a significant increase and he noted that Connecticut fared better than most states. The program will run from July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015. Peter advised that a public hearing was held on May 20, 2014 and there is an audio recording available as well as written comments. It is estimated that \$2 million will help 933 units served. The following breakdown was provided:

ABCD – 70 units

Access – 102 units

New Haven – 89 units

CRT – 103 units

NOI – 69 units

The plan is available on DEEP's website. On May 12, 2014 a Notice went out advising LIEAB and welcoming any comments or recommendations the Board may have.

Peter was asked about the units listed and he explained that a unit is an audit performed and determining what measures are needed and installing them. Peter explained that there is an allocation formula and each agency gets at least \$75,000. The eligibility is synchronized with LIHEAP. The priority is homes with children, elderly or disabled residents. Pat noted that the description fits pretty much most households. Peter stated it is a first come, first serve basis. Chuck stated that all states will be looking at energy burden as part of the data. They are starting to collect the individual energy burden data per household.

Peter noted that the 2012 program was a big reduction and was due to the large amount of ARRA funds and these funds had to be spent first. Edith noted that weatherization was the 2nd most successful program under ARRA. Carlene added that weatherization has historically had a low rate of funding.

LIEAB RECOMMENDATIONS: Joy made the changes discussed at the May meeting that the subcommittee approved.

- 1) Confidentiality is urged instead of mandated
- 2) The second Wednesday of November for 1st fuel delivery per DSS recommendation and if the 1st falls on a Wednesday then it will be the third Wednesday for delivery.
- 3) Award letters should be updated to show where the funds are coming from.

Joy read the complete list of recommendations. The Board also supported the Farm Bill \$20.01 change.

Kelly Sinko from OPM stated that June 30th for the plan would be difficult. They are doing public hearings in August. She has spoken to Ann Foley at OPM. OPM will transmit plan to the legislature in August and hopefully have hearings in August. Joy advocated keeping the June date and Joanne agreed. DSS supported OPM and Chuck said August is a really workable month. Carlene stated that in prior years the hearing had been in August and had somehow migrated to October. Edith said July 31st or August 1st should be used because DSS and OPM are making a good faith effort. Pat stated that August 1st should be used as that is what is in the law.

Another recommendation was that DSS should do its forms in an email format and it should provide CAP agency info on its website.

Joy and Joanne stated that the MPP info needs to up on the portal on November 1st date so clients know what they have to pay. Wendy stated that the CAPs can tell the companies if the letters they are sending are effective. Joanne and Joy haven't seen the CL&P letters.

LIEAB formally made a motion to recommend that all utilities provide the match after three payments have been made during the moratorium. Nora moved to adopt and Edith seconded. A vote was then taken on the LIEAB Recommendations and 6 voted in favor and that was a unanimous vote of the voting members present. Nora stated that LIEAB should clarify the rules regarding voting. Joe asked if there are any bylaws. Wendy offered to check and see if there is a standard policy.

Joy stated that there will be a subgroup with the utilities regarding how people can be encouraged to pay during the moratorium. She will be contacting the utility company members soon.

Miscellaneous: Kelly Sinko stated that Katie McDermid should be removed from the member/designee listing. Kelly is the OPM designee. Wendy informed the group that the Utility Bill of Rights was signed June 3, 2014.

Next Meeting: The meeting adjourned at 2:50 p.m. and the next meeting is scheduled for August 6, 2014.