

Low-Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting
Wednesday, October 1, 2014
HRA/Human Resources Agency
180 Clinton Street
New Britain, CT
Corrected Minutes

Members/Designees/Others In Attendance: Edith Karsky, CAFCA, Chuck Anderson, DSS, Carlene Taylor, DSS, Joseph Rosenthal, OCC, Gail Lucchina, DEEP, Joy Hollister, CLASS, Kelly Sinko. OPM, Kasia Janik, OPM, Cherlynn Villano, SCG, Frank Augeri, PURA, Alyson Ayotte, PURA, Kate Quigley, 211, Pat Wrice, Operation Fuel, Eddie Swift, NU-Yankee Gas, Veronica Gomez, NU-CL&P, Linda Foreman, DEEP, Kathy Wasilnak, UI

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

Approval of minutes of the August 6, 2014 meeting: Edith approved the minutes and Kathy seconded.

LIHEAP Update: Chuck Anderson provided handouts that included the approved benefits matrix. He advised the group that the LIHEAP plan was approved on August 25, 2014, and has been submitted and approved by the United States Department of Health and Human Services. President Obama signed a continuing resolution which included funding to LIHEAP. It is basically level funding with last year with one half of one percent deducted. Last year, the November 7, 2013, allocation was \$67,554 million and this year it will be reduced to \$67.25 million. Pat commented that the carryover is significantly less than the previous year.

Chuck advised that oil deliveries will commence November 12th. Deliverable fuel vendor documents went out yesterday. Chuck said that the guide will provide instruction on how to take applications. The early application period ended yesterday and there were 20,800 applications taken. Last year 22,500 applications were taken. Chuck attributes the decline, in part, to the computer conversion.

Carlene gave an update on the NEON situation. She stated that the Request for Application (RFA) was issued for the Stamford service area

which serves Stamford, Darien and Greenwich. Letters of intent are due November 3rd. Carlene said it is hoped that a contractor is selected by January 1st. In the Norwalk area, a Request for Interest has been issued and in a couple of weeks an RFA will be issued. It is anticipated that a selection for the Norwalk area will be made by July 1, 2015. This will result in two separate agencies. ABCD has been doing well and using Norwalk and Stamford locations. It is a little bit slow due to the fact that there is just a single phone line. Carlene will advise the Board when additional lines are added. Currently, people phone the ABCD offices to schedule appointments. Edith noted that Chuck stated at the August meeting that they are making progress. People now understand that you call a Bridgeport telephone number but the appointment is conducted in Norwalk or Stamford.

Joy inquired about the status of the CAPTAIN system. Chuck stated that everyone is transitioned as of next week. There have been mechanical issues and Chuck has been scrutinizing reports along with several others and they have been responsive to problems. There is a complicated Social Security problem that will be remedied in the transition. Time will tell how much of an improvement the new system ends up being. Joy stated that she has not seen any major catastrophes. Pat stated that there is always a learning curve.

Edith stated that CAFCA developed a bridge that provides a report to the applicant that bridges information into the calculator once they do the energy application. This was attributed to Brian Cayer of CAP Systems. They have also developed a bridge with Fuel Ware.

Carlene reported that permission has been granted to fill a Social Services Trainee position. The target class is a Social Services Technician I. The closing date to apply is October 7th. The exam is open to the public. The announcement was sent to the Energy Coordinators and will also be sent to LIEAB members. Normally the job is posted as a Connecticut Careers Trainee but a Social Services Trainee does not need a degree. The Social Services Trainee needs relevant energy experience. Edith asked how the position was funded and Carlene responded that the funding had not yet been identified.

Linda Foreman thanked Chuck for his responsiveness to DEEP and his openness in communication. Carlene also thanked him for participation in

hearings. Pat Wrice stated that the record should show that Chuck was formally thanked.

Operation Fuel: Pat stated that she just got the most recent data today. Last year it was a \$670 million program and this year they have allocated \$1 million for the summer program for the post-moratorium period. It was reported that some of the fuel banks are already out of allocations. Pat distributed a handout that showed the commitments and illustrated that the program will end sooner than expected. Pat also informed the group that this year they were able to increase dollar amounts. The summer was mild so there was not the strain of running air conditioners. The numbers presented are as of today and of bills already paid. Pat stated that they had hoped to stay open until November 1st for those most vulnerable but will not be able to do so.

Carlene asked how many fuel banks are out of money. She stated that she would like the list. Pat advised that the bigger cities are out of money. Operation Fuel will restart December 1st which will result in a two week period in which people will be exposed. Pat said she misses dealing with the fuel banks directly. Pat also said New Haven has more than one fuel bank which helps with the bottleneck. It was reported that the Bridgeport agency has changed its name and is now the Community Action Agency of Western Connecticut.

Utility Matching Payment: Kathy reported that UI, SCG and CNG are still in Phase II. UI has 1,150 customers still enrolled in the program. CNG has 4,070 and SCG has 4,078. At the next meeting Kathy said they may have final results for Phase II.

Pat stated that she was troubled by the low percentage of success. Kathy said that this year they lowered the number of payments necessary. They looked for three payments to be considered successful and still the numbers were worse. Eddie said that the education is there and customers understand the program. Edith stated that a recent study had been released which stated that many people living in poverty day to day do not have executive functioning ability. Edith stated we should go back to the drawing board and she believes a research committee should be created to meet with utility staff to determine the best way to encourage payment. Pat said the situation is getting worse and there should not be six month

intervals. She also stated that there is no danger of shutoff in Phase I. Kathy stated that UI's own plan allows customers to be matched every month if they fail in the Matching Payment Program (MPP). Pat believes that what is needed is to circle back to the low income discount rate. She said that more and more people are struggling. Pat wants to review what the rest of the country is doing and she was advised by Joy that the subcommittee is conducting such a review. Pat advocated looking at best practices and seeing what is viable in Connecticut. Joy said her previous job in another town looked at new methods. They discovered that you need to hear information seven times in order to retain the information. They extended their appointment times to one hour and asked applicants to repeat info back to the intake personnel. This resulted in the number of shutoffs actually decreasing. Some sister states are of the opinion that the moratorium is ultimately not helping customers according to Pat. Pat suggested that maybe what worked twenty years ago is not appropriate today. Eddie offered that many clients do not understand what Energy Assistance is. Chuck stated that newly unemployed people don't know what benefits are out there and that Energy Assistance is critical to getting the match. The Working Group stated that they are open to ideas.

Eddie reported that a record number of customers are switching to NUStart. Veronica is doing a great deal of outreach and they have a new video. Eddie also informed the group that it is redoing its hardship letter. Eddie reported that CL&P had 7,228 customers enrolled in Phase II. Yankee has 5,141. He will have final numbers by the next meeting. The Company matched \$9.6 million in payments. In addition, they telephoned customers who missed a payment and encouraged them to make the payment due. This telephone campaign was very successful. Over 9,000 below budget worksheets were done and it was a new record. Most customers have a \$50 below budget and so there is not a big impact. He will share data in the next meeting. He said they need to figure out how to get below budget accounts to see the program through to the end.

Miscellaneous: Frank advised that the utilities have a docket every July regarding the MPP. A hearing is held only if requested. Frank stated that he can add organizations to the Service List for the docket.

Joy is adding Kate and Edith to the subcommittee. Pat informed the group that Operation Fuel commissioned a study to review the nation's arrearage programs. She can provide the report to the group.

It was noted that the mailing is effective but Joy stated that the email reminders are phenomenal. Eddie agreed but said that a lot of low income people do not have email. Edith agreed with Eddie's statement.

Operation Fuel has sent out Save the Dates for the Joint Social Services Agencies Forum Meeting. There will only be one meeting this year. It will be held October 22nd at the Aqua Turf in Southington. There may be 350 people attending. DSS will be speaking at the event. Joy informed the group that the ADA conference is the same day. Joy stated that we should have an MPP training session at this event to teach people how to present the program and explain it to applicants. Eddie will present some information on that topic. Pat noted that if people see the bill going down then they have an incentive to pay on their bill. Joy said that it would be a good idea to include information on the bill similar to credit card statements advising how long it would take to pay off the balance if a specific payment was made each month.

Joe stated that they will be encouraging people to be on a fixed rate plan or standard service. He said that OCC is very concerned about prices in January and February. Prices are going to be much higher and the social service burden may be higher. Frank said PURA will also receive many calls. Suppliers are now targeting non-English speaking communities. Veronica stated that they are trying to educate people about scamming and a supplier expert will be attending the conference. Pat has had her neighborhood targeted. Frank said that many of these canvassers are paid by commission and they can be very aggressive. Frank did note that there is a supplier Do Not Call List. Some companies are now offering a \$50 gift card to sign up. PURA advises people to find a fixed rate or stay on standard service.

Frank talked about Docket No. 14-07-19. It involves bill redesign for the electric distribution companies. He said that changes to the bill are costly and the Legislature has asked for information that the utilities would not have access to.

Chuck said there is a joint venture for the hardship notification. There are restrictions on sharing information due to confidentiality restrictions. There is both federal and state law involved. It hinders people from getting coded hardship. There are attorneys involved and Medicare and SNAP have rules about sharing information. A third party contractor may be the best solution. Hardship is not a DSS program and you cannot share DSS information for a non-DSS program. Chuck is working hard on this and meeting with attorneys.

Next Meeting: The meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m. and the next meeting is scheduled for November 5, 2014.