

MINUTES

Low Income Energy Advisory Board
Wednesday, June 5, 2019
HRA/Human Resources Agency
75 Charter Oak Ave
Hartford, CT

Members/Designees/Others In Attendance: Alyson Ayotte, PURA, Gail Lucchina, PURA, Taren O'Connor, OCC, Nora Duncan, AARP, Brenda Watson, Operation Fuel, Carlene Taylor, DSS, Linda Foremen, DEEP, Mary Sotos, DEEP, Ruth Swift, NPU, Guy West, Clean Water Fund, Ruth Swift, NPU, Nora Benson, Eversource, Joy Hollister, Ellington, Joanne Balaschak, NOI, Suannette Golarza, SCG, Michelle Lawson, CNG, Brian Biernat, DEEP, Kathy Wasilnak, UI.

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

Approval of minutes of the April 3rd meeting: Brenda moved to approve the minutes and Ruth seconded. Minutes approved with a date correction to April 3rd.

LIHEAP: Carlene distributed the latest caseload information. She advised that the last date for applications was May 1st. She also stated that there were 8,469 safety nets. They expected to spend \$13 million but spent only \$6 million. Carlene stated that OPM increased the basic benefit to \$715 so many did not need all of the safety nets that they normally would. She also noted that the weather was strange and that there were both cold and warm periods.

Carlene also noted that there will not be a supplemental payment this year. She stated that in the past that helped with the MPP.

Carlene advised the group that next year they will be taking recommendations from LIEAB into consideration. They will be looking at how to administer the program more efficiently. They will be using last year's level of funding to plan. She noted that HHS stated that a little bump is predicted but sequestration could occur.

It was reported that \$1.7 million was spent on the Heating System Repair and Replacement program. The program has been suspended. It was reported that there were 154 heating system replacements, 17 repairs and 47 oil tank replacements. Almost 1,200 heating systems were serviced. This involves cleaning, tuning and testing. Renters can qualify if they have landlord approval.

Carlene said that the plan is due to HHS on September 1st. The plan will be sent out prior to the August LIEAB meeting.

Operation Fuel: Brenda advised that the program closed May 31st. She stated that \$2.5 million was spent on direct payments to utilities, vendors and HVAC. She said that Op Fuel is on track to serve 6,000 households. Brenda also advised that they spent \$70,000 on system repairs and replacements.

Brenda also informed the group that the MDC program had kicked off and it has been funded at \$40,000. She added that MDC is starting a program similar to the Add a Dollar program some utilities use.

Brenda noted that they have received a \$20,000 grant from the Hartford Foundation. The money was used for water assistance programs throughout the territory.

It was also announced that now people can apply online and they do not have to go to an intake site. They are going to be testing this system in a few weeks. She stated that they will not be doing an annual meeting. Instead, they will focus on more, regional, intimate trainings that will focus on the database.

Brenda advised that Op Fuel has an opportunity to partner with CT Water to administer their H2O Program.

MPP: Suannette advised that the following matches had been done.

UI: 1500 successful
1300 failed

SCG: 5000 successful
7,700 failed

CNG: 4,600 successful
7,400 failed

She advised that last years' results were almost the same. She stated that she would email the data as soon as possible. Joy noted her concerns about why people fail. Brenda noted that they are working on guidance and a bit of handholding to increase success rates. Brenda stated that the database will show which people can proceed independently and which ones need month to month reminders. Linda Foreman says she has gotten calls from seniors.

Michelle noted that arrearage forgiveness and MPP are very different and they do explain the difference.

Nora reported the following for Eversource:

5,908 matched
2,753 no balances to match. They owed zero or less.
7,181 failed

Joy made the observation that people receive bills that say Do Not pay so they don't pay and they do not get matched. She feels it is confusing to customers. Michelle advised that is only for people with credit balances. Joanne agreed with Joy that it is confusing and regardless of what the bill says you must continue to pay the budgeted amount. Joy said it is a complicated program and some CAP agencies make clients come back for an intensive explanation. They had a focus group and the recommendations of the group are due to PURA by July 1st. Nora stated that she wants a presentation on the recommendations at the August meeting. She stated that one hour will be set aside at that meeting for the presentation.

Legislative Matters and Misc: Alyson noted that Docket No. 18-06-02 regarding Hardship Customers staying on the standard offer has scheduled a hearing on July 16th at PURA.

Taren advised that OCC and AARP are fighting against the direct billing of suppliers. It is HB7155.

There was carryover discussion of the Board's recommendations regarding the LIHEAP plan. There is going to be an outreach effort. Joy wants training for the people that do the applications. They need training directly from the utilities. Joy has a location in Wethersfield that can hold 500 people. They can have a Utility Day. Brenda noted that some CAP agencies use seasonal employees and they are not well trained. She stated that the agencies should maintain a training bible. Joanne noted that DSS provides updated information every year. Joy wants to make certain the CAPS send people to learn.

Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned at 3:00. Taren made the Motion to Adjourn and Ruth seconded.

Next Meeting: The next meeting was scheduled for October 2nd.