

LIEAB Minutes December 2, 2020

Meeting Attendees:

Brenda Watson, Annette Rodriguez, Brian Biernat, Carlene Taylor, Deb Pouln, Frank Augeri, Gannon Long, Jeff Brown, Joy Hollister, Laura Mason, Linette Pisani, Michael Li, Mike Malone, Nelida Handy, Nickey Kollie, Remy Miller, Ruth Swift, Ruth L, Tina Sargent, Tracy Kelsey, Tyra Anne Peluso, Theresa Washington, Kimberly White, Wendy Wanchak, Joanne Balaschak, Keisha Edwards

Approval of the October minutes

Motion to discuss minutes Approved by Deb Pouln and Frank Augeri

Presentation on Operation Fuel Client Portal – Ruth L and Jeff Brown, Community Software Group

Online application process was reviewed utilizing sample data from Massachusetts

Digital submission of documentation or send in info to agency

Interview questions are answered either by the client or by individual assisting client with entering the required information into the digital portal

At the end of the process there is a digital sign off on the legal documentation to allow for verification of entered information.

Questions and Answers

Theresa Washington – Does this information feed into any utility company?

Answer: It could since it uses a standardize data transfer protocol

Deb Pouln – Is this program used by CAA's or those outside of the CAA Network?

Answer: This program is used mostly by the CAA network in MA as well as by two Municipalities

Deb Pouln – Are applicants or agencies entering the information into the system?

Answer: The client can set up their own account or an agency can set up the account for them

Frank Augeri – Can this be used for Weatherization?

Answer: Yes it is used by the Massachusetts Weatherization Network.

Carlene Taylor – How is this referring the clients to the correct CAA's?

Answer: It uses the zip-code which correlates to the CAA covering that community.

Carlene Taylor – At what point do they upload income verification?

Answer: The client can upload the income verification documentation during or after the application process and when it is completed a notice is given to the agency that the documentation requirements have been completed.

Carlene Taylor – Is a worklist submitted to each agency?

Answer: They are provided with a summary of submissions and current status of all required paperwork

Theresa Washington – Is the customer given an expected turnaround time when uploading documentation and agency review?

Answer: the work flow can be tracked by the customer when they login to the portal so turnaround time can be tracked. The process in general takes between 10 and 15 minutes if everything submitted is correct and complete

Joy Hollister – Can the application be done on a cell phone?

Answer: Yes it can be done on a mobile platform

Theresa Washington – Is there a mobile app?

Answer: The online submission is PDF'd and flexibility exists to work within the online system and mobile environment.

Joy Hollister- IS there a way for agencies who do application that are not CAA's to access client applications to help them be completed?

Answer: it is possible for a non-CAA to access a client application as long as permission has been granted between that client and the entity assisting them.

LIHEAP Update – Carlene Taylor, DSS

Carlene reviewed the handout provided to the LIHEAP Members summarizing the current Program Year.

The latest caseload report was included as an attachment

The number of denials is up due to incomplete income verification, DSS will be meeting with agencies to discuss paths to improving.

90% of grant received as of November and remainder will be determined based on redistribution of carry over funds.

Sent out second payments to clients

Low Application rates- surveyed agencies and determined it may be difficult for agencies to adapt to the new mail-in application process since they excel at in person applications other factors may be the weather and moratorium on service disconnections.

Questions and Answers

Wendy Wanchak – Is application accepted once it is coded or does it require a signature before being accepted?

Answer: once the phone call is made to the CAA the client application is started and considered taken. The client then has to provide a signature on the application within a certain amount of time or the application will be denied.

Agency staffing problems might be resulting in increased application denials, not so much a problem of people not applying to the program, low rates may be the result of an agencies in ability to process applications

DSS will send follow-up communications to the board communicating the changes being made to reduce denials and increase over application numbers

Wendy Wanchak- Can staff from other agencies be utilized by agencies who are having staffing problems?

Answer: The agencies are currently utilizing employment agencies to hire new staff as needed since agency staffing is a problem at several of the agencies

EDC's Matching Payment Program Updates

Eversource provided an attachment with updates on its programs

Eversource Update - Theresa Washington

Matching Payment Program – Overall enrollment is up

New Start – Enrollment is down

Arrearage Forgiveness Program – overall enrollment is down

UIL provided an attachment with updates on its programs

UIL Update – Nelida Handy

Below Budget Worksheet- Reviewed success rates of the programs

Phase 2 – Reviewed the success rates of the programs

PURA Dockets – Frank Augeri – PURA

20-03-15 – Review of utility applications for shut-off protection and dates for shut-off to end (Jan)

20-01-01 – Eversource delivery fee docket – Authority ruled that rate increase will be rolled back, will review rate increase from July and review the process for evaluating rate increases.

20-07-04 - 31 orders were issued regarding compliance

12-12-03 RE 01 – Track 4 – Report regarding this docket will be sent to the board for review.

Kim White provided an overview of the recommendations made in the report.

- Pro issued recommendations for utilities to retrain their customer service representatives to better answer questions and properly code customers for hardship and arrearage assistance programs
- Orders to get utilities to better market EA and EE to low-income customers
- Better manage the customers arrearage so bills are more approachable by low-income customers

Wendy and Brenda recognized the efforts of the board members who were involved in the process

2022 Plan Sub Committee

Joy Hollister will chair the sub committee

Currently looking for volunteers to participate in sub committee

Subcommittee would like to make recommendations for the plan and present to the legislator these recommendations who will then make the corresponding changes to the state plan.

Due date for recommendations would be by April 2021 meeting

Wendy Wanchak – suggested reinstating subcommittee for advising PURA and OCC decisions

Adjourn

Motion to adjourn meeting by Deb Pouln and Ruth Swift