

Low-Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting
Wednesday, May 7, 2014
HRA/Human Resources Agency
180 Clinton Street
New Britain, CT

Members/Designees/Others In Attendance: Frank Augeri, PURA, Kate Quigley, 211, Edith Karsky, CAFCA, Nora Duncan, AARP, Eddie Swift, NU, Rhonda Evans, CAFCA, Veronica Gomez, NU, Chuck Anderson, DSS, Carlene Taylor, DSS, Taren O'Connor, OCC, Gail Lucchina, DEEP, Joy Hollister, CLASS, Kerri Kemp, Norwich Public Utilities, Laura Gonzalez, UI

Welcome: The meeting was convened at 1:32 p.m. Joy Hollister chaired the meeting in Pat Wrice's absence.

Approval of minutes of April 2, 2014 meeting: Rhonda Evans moved approval and Taren O'Connor seconded.

LIHEAP Update: Chuck Anderson reported that there have been over 100,000 cases that have been certified. It is anticipated that there will be a 1.5 to 1.7 percent increase from the prior year. This growth can be attributed to the extremely cold weather. The final carryover amount in late June will be approximately \$1.2 million. Chuck reported that they did process 7,136 more safety nets over the previous year. In addition, LIHEAP budgets money for employment programs, staffing and other expenditures designed to help people increase their household income so they will eventually no longer need to receive LIHEAP benefits.

Chuck reported that the Farm Bill passed and modifications may be made May 7th. He noted that of the \$1.7 million LIHEAP SNAP allocation, \$1.6 million has already been expended. When individuals apply for SNAP they qualify for the \$20.01 and the intake workers are aware of this.

It was reported that the benefit matrix shows a slight increase in electricity and natural gas is predicted for the next heating season. It also predicts a slight decrease to \$3.62 per gallon for oil.

Chuck reported that last year \$7.2 million in funding was brought forward and this year it is approximately \$1.2 million. Early intake will not experience any problems next year because that has administrative costs

of only \$400,000. The lower carryover will affect the amount of benefits. In previous years, it was known that vendors would get paid for early deliveries. Chuck stated that if there is a large carryover you can pay the oil deliverers promptly. The grant awards come late October or early November. If initial deliveries are November 13th, the agencies don't have the funds to pay until approximately Thanksgiving. Carlene stated that vendors sometimes say they won't deliver unless they get paid. Edith said it is the customers that get hurt when the vendors want payment immediately.

It was reported that Laverne Allen is moving over to DSS very soon. Her expertise will be missed. The Board offered congratulations to Laverne. They are trying to establish a refill position and they are also trying to refill Tom's position from last year.

NEON: Carlene reported that things have been happening behind the scenes regarding this CAP agency. There may be an impending bankruptcy filing and voluntary decertification. The Agency is still open and they are using cell phones at the moment due to the disconnection of the telephones. It was noted that the staff are deserving of a great deal of credit. Joy asked if employees will be able to transfer to another CAP. Carlene said that is possible. Edith advised that it is hoped that a new CAP will be appointed for that area which consists of eight towns. There is a process to accomplish this and more information is expected next week. Carlene said that LIHEAP staff at NEON is not affected. The decertification would involve CSBG which stands for the Community Services Block Grant.

A new three year contract with Community Action Agencies is being entered into and there is no predicted drop off in Community Action Agencies.

The board was notified that DSS is moving to Farmington Avenue. Chuck also advised that it is imperative that the LIHEAP hearing is held early next season due to the low carryover amount. Edith stated that Connecticut is one of the few states that have this process for block grants that can be quite lengthy. Laura inquired if anyone had considered changing the legislation? Chuck said that there was actually a proposal to make it October 1st which would be even later. Chuck was assured there would still

be a September hearing. Edith stated that the block grants are done at the same time even though LIHEAP is done separately.

Operation Fuel update: Pat Wrice was not in attendance and no report was given.

Utility Matching Payment Program Update: Laura reported that UI, SCG and CNG made a change to the MPP billing. SCG started its MPP processing Friday so the May bill may contain the match or it will inform that the customer is off the program. Laura stated that it is too soon to tell how many customers succeeded in the program. Laura informed the Board that the Company is considering having three payments be deemed a success rather than the current requirement of six payments. The winter was a tough one so the Company made this change this year and it is something they will learn from going forward. She also advised that John Dobos retired and three new members are being appointed to the Board. Dalyn Delgado, who works for CNG; Kathy Wasilnak, who is a UI employee with MPP experience and Cherlynn Vallano who is a manager of the SCG Call Center. Laura stated that this would be her last LIEAB meeting. She found it a pleasure to be on LIEAB and learned a great deal. Chuck asked who his primary contact should be and he was advised that person would be Kathy.

Eddie reported that CL&P and Yankee added 10,589 customers. The below budget numbers were reported as 5,748 for CL&P and 3,257 for Yankee for a total of 9,005 below budgets out of 34,000 customers. This is a large increase. The MPP program is delayed until May 9th so the success or failure results will be provided at the June meeting.

Joy provided information that she received a confidential email from someone expressing shock at the enormity of the shutoffs that are occurring after the moratorium. Laura stated that at UI if the only payment received has been the Energy Assistance payment, then the customer is shutoff. The phone calls at the call center go way up as the May 1st date approaches. Eddie and Veronica responded that if MPP is no longer an option then customers have the NUStart program. The utility companies want to do everything they can to make payment arrangements to avoid terminations. Kerri stated that Norwich is very liberal in their payment arrangement terms. Joy said that some clients cannot afford NUStart and maybe can only pay \$150 but may be hesitant to pay that lower amount if

the end result is that they are going to get shut off anyway. Edith stated that it is an important issue and perhaps a subcommittee should be established to review the matter. Utility members will participate in the subcommittee. Carlene suggested looking at other states to see what they are doing. Frank Augeri offered that the companies want an arrangement that will eventually lead to a payoff of the arrearage. Eddie says programs like MPP and NUStart are the best option.

LIHEAP Draft Recommendations: Edith raised a question on Item No. two. It concerns taking Energy Assistance applications in confidential areas. Edith is of the opinion that this should not be a requirement. She noted that it is difficult in some offices to have a completely private space. Joy stated that the confidentiality language is contained in the Health and Human Services guidelines but it should be in the state plan so people do not have their private information compromised. This should be a priority according to Joy. Carlene believes that it is hard to enforce. Nora stated that it is also hard to define exactly what constitutes the definition of confidential. Frank suggested changing the wording and substituting “encourage” rather than “require”. Joy agreed with this suggestion. Edith explained that workers do go through courses concerning the protection of confidential information but it is too difficult to make it a requirement.

Chuck advised the group that Item No. four involves the actual federal regulation and that is why it is listed.

Edith also raised a question concerning Item No. six. Item six states that the language on award letters should be updated to indicate where the award is coming from. Joy said that the letter states that it is state and federal dollars but it is not state funding at all. She had a client with a letter that listed state dollars but that is not correct. The letter needs to be worked on according to Carlene. They will rectify the situation. She noted that in the past it did include state money.

Carlene raised the issue of posting energy forms on the website. She stated that the forms can be included on the website but they must be labeled as samples or as drafts to prevent people from printing them and sending them off. Joy asked if the process can be expedited. Carlene replied that she can send the form as a PDF to expedite it. Carlene said she will also try to separate the forms. Joy explained that at present she

gets the Desk Manual and prints the forms off but there are no individual forms. Sending them as PDF files would be helpful.

Chuck mentioned Item No. five. He said a supervisor in his office mentioned that making the program date a Wednesday might be the perfect day to choose. Wednesday would give them time to process payment. The idea of using the same day of the week is better than using a date, however, Wednesday would be preferable to Friday.

Nora stated that the group should review a final draft of the recommendations and then conduct an electronic vote. Joy raised the issue of whether an electronic vote was appropriate and Nora stated that it was allowable. The group decided to officially vote at the June meeting.

Taren advised that she will be on maternity leave and Joe Rosenthal will be filling in during her absence.

Miscellaneous: Taren discussed the on-bill financing and termination for not repaying the loan. She stated that Wendy and Cecil attended the EEB meeting to speak against the termination of service for nonpayment of the loan. She also informed the group that all but two members voted against this provision. OCC believed the shutoff provision was fundamentally wrong. The OCC is in the process of crafting on-bill language with Connecticut's Green Bank. It was also mentioned that the EEB has a meeting on May 14th to discuss its draft plan. Shirley Bergert is concerned about on-bill financing and is not sure that the matter will not resurface. Taren will follow up with Shirley to see if it is just a matter of reinforcing their earlier position of opposition.

Nora advised that the Connecticut Energy Advisory Board (CEAB) is no longer. There were no public hearings on the matter. She also stated that AARP was on the board to represent consumers. Taren stated that the CEAB budget was taken away and the board was dwindling. It was not known if the administrative dollars would go to CEFIA.

SB 2 and the issue of third party electric suppliers were discussed. AARP says SB2 contains improvements but it did not go far enough. Nora advised that SB2 provides for additional PURA staff as part of the third party supplier legislation. Nora stated that no one should be overly

enthusiastic about the protections. She informed the board that Pennsylvania is passing a stronger version of SB2.

There was brief discussion regarding the future potential for people going off the grid eventually causing higher rates for those remaining on the grid.

NEXT MEETING: The next meeting will be held on June 4, 2014. Taren moved to adjourn and Nora seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 3:12.