

Meeting Attendees:

Ally Ayotte, Amy McLean, Bernard Pelletier, Brenda Watson, Carlene Taylor, Clair Sickinger, Corina Wallack, Danielle Pallandino, Darlene Yule, Deb Polun, Elaine Ulrich, Frank Augeri, Gannon Long, Joanne Whistnant, Joy Hollister, Kate Quigley, Kathy Wasilnak, Katrina Metzler, Katy Fay, Kim White, Laura Bozzi, Leticia Colon, Linette Pisani, Lissette Andino, Michael LI, Michael S Uhl, Milledge West, Nelida Handy, Nicole Lowler, Nora Benson, Nora Duncan, Richard Faesy, Rose Croog, Ruth Swift, Ruth Swift, Starley Arias, Stephen Cowell, Tasha Perreault, Theresa Washington, Tracy Kelsey, Tyra Anne Peluso

Presentation:

Flexible and Limitations of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) – Katrina Metzler, Executive Director NEUAC

Katrina provided a link to the LIHEAP action day, held virtually due to COVID-19

An overview of the flexibility and limitations of the LIHEAP program funds.

- LIHEAP is a block grant established in 1981.
- Funds are appropriated annually by congress
- There has been a 10 million dollar increase for FY21 already approved. 90 percent released in November 2020. The remainder to be released in the spring of 2021.
- Previously \$900 million was appropriated through the CARES Act
- The mission of LIHEAP is to assist low income households with their energy needs

What ISN'T flexible?

- Cannot give LIHEAP directly to a utility without establishing customer eligibility
- Cannot change the administrative cost cap of 10% for the program
- Cannot exceed the stated eligibility criteria or serve an ineligible house hold
- Cannot violate your own state rules. Including for fiscal accountability
- Cannot pay water or sewer bills

LIHEAP Assurances

- Federal Regulations and LIHEAP statue: www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs/resource/liheap-statue-and-regulations
- Conditions for operating the federal program
- Must comply with Assurances 1-15 and 16 if funding is used for that purpose
- Assurances are certified by the Chief Executive Officer or governor of a state and submitted annually by the grantee via the LIHEAP State Plan to the US Department of HHS

Allowable use of the funds

- Conduct outreach activities
- Intervene in energy crisis situations
- Provide low cost residential weatherization
- Plan, develop and administer the program

Program Design Flexibilities

- Types of benefits
- Amount of benefit and factors influencing benefit
- Start and end dates (with exception of crisis program)
- If weatherization is offered...
 - 15% pass through or 25% with a waiver from HHS
 - Contribution requirement by landlord in some places
 - Flexibility to repair/ replace furnaces, hot water tanks indoor ventilation and other equipment if related to energy savings
- Low Income Solar Options
 - Access for limited income households to solar to reduce energy burden
- States needed to determine what “crisis” meant when COVID-19 began.

Eligibility

- 150% of the Federal Poverty Level(FPL)
- 60% of the State Median Income (SMI)
- May not be set lower than 110% of the FPL

What may or may not count as income

- Supplemental unemployment issued in FY20,FY21
- Assets tests
- Child support

Time period for determining eligibility most commonly used is 60 or 90 days retrospective.

Optional categorical eligibility

- TANF
- SNAP
- Supplemental Security Income
- Means Tested Veteran Program

Split benefit is an option not a requirement.

Due to COVID-19 conversations about increasing the eligibility levels are being held.

Presentation Conclusion: Katrina Metzler provider her contact information.

Brenda asked if there were any questions for Katrina

Question: Can you talk more about Assurance 16 and some of the flexibility for those funds.

Answer: I am not the most qualified person to ask about Assurance 16. It is one of the places where low income solar can come into play but there is a lot of flexibility to Assurance 16 and I can refer you to the right person to ask.

Question; I thought that the consolidated appropriations act passed that will provide funding to state for water billing assistance

Answer: It did! There was the end of year act, which created a water assistance fund at the federal level. 638 million under the department of health and human services who we answer to as LIHEAP providers. It is still being determined how the program could be implemented.

Question: Can you comment on LIHEAP Funds to address health and safety barriers

Answer: I am a fan of using the LIHEAP funds and LIHEAP rules to administer the weatherization program through LIHEAP because it gives you flexibility to address health and safety barrier. Or you can use crisis funds to assists with health and safety as well.

Brenda thanked Katrina for her presentation.

Brenda explained the importance of having this presentation.

Agenda Item: Planning and Development of 2022 CT LIHEAP Plan

Brenda: PURA recommendation; many of you are aware of the certain process that came out of the PURA investigation into the distribution planning and equitable and modern grid, docket 17 12 03 re01. That process began in the summer of 2019 and concluded in 2020. As the subcommittee is drafting the 2022 LIHEAP plan, I'd like us to remember that there are near and median to long term recommendations in the interim decision that this board should embrace and work towards per our mandate.

There are a few recommendations that stood out. Reviewing the energy efficiency of weatherization and components of customer energy bills advocating for reviewing for energy efficiency in weatherization programs. The energy sweeps from 2016 decimated the clean energy industry and the workforce, but more importantly, it hurt customers.

Brenda asked the board to take some time to read the report or review it again.

Brenda suggested the development of a weatherization task force that reviews the weatherization numbers compared to the number of households that need to be weatherized.

Brenda would like to see the LIEAB board move away from being a reporting board to a working board and if any board member is interested in a weatherization taskforce to let her know.

Plan Subcommittee Meeting:

Brenda asked for Joy provide an update on the plan subcommittee meeting that occurred in January.

Joy is having technical difficulty

Brenda asked if someone else could provide an update.

Deb: We started by reviewing the recommendations from last year and we did not get through them all we scheduled a follow up meeting for February 9th at 1:30 pm

Program Updates

CEAP Report

Linette provided an update on the numbers

Linette: Across the network, we took 65,296 applications, 40,534 total eligible households, 21,467 total denied. Percentages are down due to issues pivoting to servicing customers during the pandemic. A CEAP flexibility work group was held today in hope to help with application guidelines. With CEAP flexibility, we are hoping to see an uptick.

Question: Gannon; what does CEAP flexibility mean?

Answer: Flexibility guidelines implemented by our director and Carlene extend bring back time from 10 days to 20 days. Clients would not have to reapply but submit the information. If clients had Social Security, income for the past 2 years, that information could be used from previous application and customers did not need to resubmit it.

Gannon: would you be able to share the link so we could read it.

Linette: it is not a link but I can share the CEAP flexibility with you.

Carlene: Based on discussion in earlier meetings with the agencies and difficulties they were encountering, we did those flexibilities and are continuing to research additional flexibilities and we will be meeting in 2 weeks but our hope is based on the discussion we had today we will be able to add more flexibilities to help customers in and eligible for the program.

Deb: The flexibility are really helpful in getting people enrolled, my understanding is that the numbers are still down due to the back log but as we move forward we will see the application numbers go up.

Question: Kim; does application taken mean every application that have been sent in or applications that have begun to be processed.

Answer: Carlene: I think each agency may approach it differently but we can check and get back to you on that. Another question that was asked in the last meeting was about the number of people that had look at the application but I will follow up.

Kim: Would it be possible for you to email that information to the group prior to the meeting

Carlene Yes, I will follow up with Brenda

Brenda: does anyone have anything else on this item?

Carlene: We have received 90 percent for our allocation from HHS but we have not received guidance from them as to where we go from here. We are still waiting to find out what the balance of those dollars are but we were told we could not receive less than what we received the previous years.

Carlene: An update on the heating system repair replacement. So far we have 53 replacements all major repairs. We did include hot water heaters. To date we have done 4 of those most of the funding has gone to replacement which are 31 and oil tanks which are 17. We have set aside \$1.8 million for health and safety. Servicing of heating systems is still low and conversation with CEMA are being held to see how the numbers could increase.

Theresa: When we are looking at all the CEAP applications taken is that higher than last year.

Carlene: we do a comparison on the page. We are 9 percent less than last year.

Brenda: question in the chat: do you include tank removal if systems are switch from oil burner/ furnaces to heat pump?

Carlene: We have not done any changes from oil to heat pump but we mostly replace it with the same heating type and we never touch oil tanks that are in ground but we do them if they are outside or in the basement while following local zoning regulations.

Carlene: A question in the chat about allocation of funds to health and safety barriers to weatherization. In previous years we would allocate funds for that purpose and it would be allocated to DEEP.

Would it be a possibility to do that in the 2022 plan?

There is that conversation but last year the decision was made to not allocate because the funds were not being expended.

Are there restriction from changing from oil to heat pump?

LIHEAP does not restrict changing from one heat type to another.

Brenda suggested having a heat pump presentation based on the interest shown

Operation Fuel

Brenda: we are experiencing a huge drought in application possibly due to the moratorium. We are hoping that think pick up. I will provide an update and an email once the numbers are in the new system.

Question Deb; Percentage wise where are your numbers as compared to last year?

Answer” we are a lot lower than last year the summer fall program was like a banner season we served 2000 households, which we don’t normally get that many. Normally when the CEAP numbers are down our numbers are down.

A copy of the low income discount rate was sent out. Please read it to refresh your memories.

Utility update

Avan Grid: MAPP currently has about 3,557 customers with balances of 5.4 million COVID-19 repayment plan UI Commercial 705 customers with balances of about 2.8 million. residential has 6,105 customer with 6.7 million. At Connecticut natural gas, commercial has 129 customers with about 312 thousand; residential has 1,677 with a balance of 1.2 million. At southern Connecticut Gas, Commercial has 131 customer with 197 thousand in balances. Residential has 2,218 with balances of about 1.4 million. Arrearage forgiveness totals for UI was 2,569 customers. CNG has 7,780 customers and SGC has 8,134 customers.

Eversource: New start has 4,362 customers enrolled from the beginning of the year with the forgiveness of over 1 million dollars. The matching payment program has just over 28 thousand enrolled with almost 41 million dollars in balance. At this time there, just over 37 thousand enrolled in the forgiveness program.

Question Carlene: At the end, you do an analysis of the numbers that were successful

Theresa we do an analysis towards the filing and will have the information available.

Brenda opened the floor for nonmembers to talk.

Richard Faysey.: EEB and other are very interested in remedying the issues in home and health safety barriers and we would like to work with the board and presenting a proposal in a future meeting.

Mike Li: There is a distinction between using the LIHEAP funds in the weatherization program and using the LIHEAP funds in the HES program. The federal Weatherization Assistance

Program did not have the capacity to take extra money. What Richard and Leticia are commenting is a separate topic.

Carlene: adding to what Michael said. My understanding is that the role of LIEAB is to make recommendations to the DSS and OPM in the development of LIHEAP funds. When we have looked at safety measures, it is usually to allow weatherization of other federally funded programs.

Guy: What does the covid-19 section of the UI report consist of?

Nelly: there is a covid-19 payment plan that allows customers to take their past due balance and pay it over a 24-month payment plan.

Brenda: For the April meeting I have already invited the folks at CEMA to present on bio fuels and I will work on finding someone to present on heat pumps

Leticia: inaudible

Steve: there is no restriction that prevents LIHEAP from going to utility programs and that is what Richard has been working on.

Meeting Minutes

Kate Quigley made a motion to approve the December minutes. Ruth second.

Adjourn

Motion to adjourn meeting by Kate Quigley and second unknown.