

Low-Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting

Wednesday, June 2, 2021 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM (EDT)

1. Call to Order

Chairperson Brenda Watson called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. Remote meeting held via Microsoft Teams.

2. Attendance

Present: *Brenda Watson, Wendy Wanchack, Rosemary Lopez, Nora Duncan, Deb Polun, Christian Herb, Nickey Kollie, Joy Hollister, Nora Benson, Tyra Peluso, Frank Augeri, Kathleen Wasilnak, Carlene Taylor, Danielle Palladino, Owen Rood.*

Absent: *Nelida Handy, Kenneth Millerd, Ruth Swift, Nicole Lawton, Lisa Temper-Bates, Michael Li*

****Note: The Southern Connecticut Gas Company Representative, Luz Rodriguez is no longer serving on the board. New representative to be determined.***

3. Minutes for Approval

Minutes for Wednesday, April 7, 2021 & February 3, 2021

Motion by: Deb Polun

Second by: Wendy Wanchak

Abstained: Kathleen Wasilnak

Opposed by: none

****Note: Kathleen Wasilnak requested an amendment to the February meeting minutes to reflect her absence, and correct the Avangrid name. Kathleen also requested an amendment to the April meeting minutes include her last name on the meeting attendance and to state that the February meeting minutes were not reviewed in the April meeting.***

****Note: Rosemary Lopez stated that she attended for the April Meeting. An amendment will be made to reflect her attendance.***

4. Presentation by Dr. Laura Bozzi, Yale Center on Climate Change

Presentation on LIHEAP Cooling Assistance.

- Yale Center on Climate Change and Health based out of the Yale School Public Health works on research, education, public health practices and policies to address the health effects of climate change and to study how the factors that contribute to climate change (burning of fossil fuels) also affects our health.
- Dr. Bozzi's work focuses on Connecticut and is capsulated in the *Climate Change and Health in Connecticut 2020 Report, Extreme Heat In Connecticut: A Yale Center on Climate Change and Health Issue Brief* and *The Air Quality Health Benefits of Climate Action in Connecticut A Yale Center on Climate Change and Health Issue Brief*.
- The annual Average temperature increased by over 3°F in Connecticut from 1895 to 2019.
- Extreme heat events are expected to be more common, severe and to last longer in the future. Temperature increases after 2050 depend on how quickly the emission of greenhouse gases stop.

- Heat waves can result in heat related illnesses that could lead to death. Ozone pollution can trigger asthma and worsening lung conditions.
- Climate change called a risk amplifier, because the impacts of extreme heat are unequal based on housing quality, energy affordability, neighborhood characteristics, employment type, existing medical conditions, income, and race.
- The Connecticut Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3) "monitors and reports the state's progress on the implementation of carbon mitigation strategies, development and implementation of adaptation strategies to assess and prepare for the impacts of climate change in areas such as infrastructure, agriculture, natural resources and public health."
- The GC3 working group has recommended the expansion of LIHEAP to include cooling assistance.
- Weatherization, heat pumps and renewable energy are holistic approach to cooling and can extend the cooling assistance.
- Heat pumps are an energy efficient way to address both heating and cooling.
- Example program to consider is Maine Housing's heat pump program that pays for the cost and installation of heat pump for Maine homeowners eligible for LIHEAP.
- Dr. Bozzi closed with the question "What could the state's LIHEAP program do to help democratize and make renewable energy available to everyone in the State?"

Brenda Watson commented that she has been looking at how warm weather states market their energy assistance program as a way to help get the word out the customers served in Connecticut. In Arizona, the majority of the heat deaths are related to not having electricity in the homes and that it is more likely to impact men because men are less likely to seek help when they are feeling distressed.

Brenda Watson: The number of fuel assistance request for Operation Fuel has dropped over the years and the number of people seeking assistance with electricity has increased. We noticed a shift in our busy season originally January to March now March to October. We are going to continue to monitor and if it keeps occurring, we will be changing the program dates so we can get the most demand at the busiest time.

5. Old Business/ Program Updates

LIHEAP/CEAP Update: Carlene Taylor

- There has been drop in number of application taken by 2.5% statewide and we are not the only state. It is believed that this was caused by the extended moratoriums.
- The approval rate is down. At the last LIEAB meeting, we discussed addressing some of those concerns regarding the large number of income ineligible households.
- We have lifted a lot of policy changes that we had in place. We suspended that liquid asset test and made categorically eligible households more flexible. Conducted bulk recertification by running income ineligible households and comparing them to eligible households, when a match was found, it removed the need for redetermination.

Joy Hollister: Did the changes make significant improvement?

Carlene Taylor: I pulled information from April that determined that we had 20,000 households that were income ineligible and that is now down to a little over 12,000. We had hope for a higher percentage than that but the changes did help.

Wendy Wanchak: What about the application deadline is it going to be fixed to June 15?

Carlene Taylor: Yes, I think it is because we do have to close up to start up for next year. As you know, we start taking in application on August 1st, so we have to wind down, close out and get all the system changes done to start the program in August.

LIHEAP/CEAP Update Continued: Carlene Taylor

- Available Funds: 83.25 million dollars. 73.5 from the block grant, 5.6 from the CARES ACT, 370 thousand dollars in LIHEAP refunds we get from the utility companies and 10 percent we are allowed to carry forward (3.65 million dollars)
- Expenditures: Total estimate 55.28 million dollars
- Total commitment to date are a little over 55 million dollars
- Outstanding Authorizations are at 2.2 million dollars
- Total Expenditure/Authorization is 57.5 million leaving an estimated balance of 25.7 million dollars.
- Our maximum Carryover is about 7.3 million dollars.
- We doubled the rental assistance benefits and are in the process of sending those funds to the agencies to make the payments. We are including an insert with the payments informing the households of the benefit increase and the reason why.

Brenda Watson: Is there a draft plan of next year's program to view yet?

Carlene Taylor: No, and the process is that the plan goes to the governor's office before it is released.

Steve Cowel: Does this mean that about 18.4 million dollar is going to be sent back between the estimated balance and the carry over?

Carlene Taylor: No, this is what the balance is as of today. We still have additional expenditures before the end of the fiscal year but there will be more than the 10 percent we are allowed to carry over. I do not know the exact amount but the allocation plan states what we can do if we have excess funds. In the past, we have done additional payments to utility heated households. We make every effort not to send any money back.

LIHEAP/CEAP Update Continued: Carlene Taylor

- *We allocated 1.8 million dollars for heating system repair replacement. So far we have spent almost 1.4 million dollars.*
- *We have done 118 heating system replacement, 81 oil tanks, 17 water heaters and 15 repairs that are more than the allowed \$750 repair. Any repair more than \$750 has to go through DSS for review and approval.*
- *56 repairs were done by the agencies that are under \$750.*
- *So far we have done 605 servicing of heating systems. We have not received all the numbers from our agency but that number continues to be low.*
- *ARPA Funds: 94 million dollars allocated. It is not part of the 10 percent carry forward. HHS has indicated that those funds can be obligated through September 2023 and must be spent by December of 2023.*

- We were going to receive funds for the low-income household water assistance program. HHS has said that they would provide allocations by the end of the May grant awards. DSS has received an initial grant award of 4.2 million dollars in relation to the American Rescue Plan and today we received 5.4 million dollars in relation to Consolidated Appropriations Act. As you recall there two allocations of funding for the water and sewer program. 638 million dollars out of the Consolidated Appropriations Act and 500 thousand dollars out of the American Rescue Plan for a total of 1.1 billion dollars. HHS has stated that this will be a separate program from LIHEAP. The funds do not have to be fully obligated until September 2023. Categorical eligibility will include LIHEAP households otherwise the income guidelines are up to 150 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. In addition, this program is solely to pay for water and sewer bill. If you have a well or septic system, those are not counted and it does not pay for repair to water and sewer equipment.

Amy McLean: Just for clarification, I attended the LIHEAP approval process and I was under the impression that it goes to the committees before going to the governor's desk.

Carlene Taylor: No, DSS is the grantee appointed by the Governor, the commissioner or his designee. The planning process starts here and it includes the Office of Policy Management (OPM) because they are staff assigned to various programs at DSS. We work with OPM, who then releases the plan to the Governor's office. The Governor's office releases it to the leadership in the general assembly and their three committees of cognizance that have to act on the plan within a certain number of days or it becomes automatically approved.

Amy McLean: What is the normal timeline for this process?

Carlene Taylor: Usually we are asked by OPM to submit the plan by the second week of July. There is a statute to submit the plan to the General Assembly by August 1. Then they have up to 30 days to act on it.

Amy Mclean: How often does this process happen?

Carlene Taylor: Once a year.

Brenda Watson: Commented that the steps be documented as we are in the process of developing bylaws for the board.

Operation Fuel Update: Brenda Watson

- We are still in the process of finalizing our numbers but the preliminary numbers for Fiscal Year 21, which ended on May 14 but it is looking like we have provided a little over 6 thousand households with energy assistance this year.
- Total amount in grant for the year was 3.3 million dollars.
- We noticed a drop in the number of people we thought we would see due to moratoriums in place and limited access to fuel banks due to limited operation because of COVID.

- Fiscal Year changes: The program will resume July 12. An adjustment is being made to the Home System Repair and Replace Program to include heat pump installations for furnaces that are red tagged and only for home that have been weatherized.
- Cutting down on the number of in person fuel bank because we are seeing a drop in the number of people going into fuel banks to apply for assistance over the years. We are keeping some fuel banks that have not submitted applications out of concern for broadband issues.

Matching Payment Program Update:

Eversource: Nora Benson

- Matching Payment Program Initial Phase I: May 2021 had 4,685 electric customers and 4,004 gas customers for a total 8,689. In comparison, May 2020 had total of 9,438. Making a difference of -749 between the two years.
- Active Matching Payment Program: Total of 30,242 customers for the regular MPP and total of 407 for the COVID MPP.
- New Start Forgiveness YTD: 2021 total of 11,893 households served, a difference of -1,736 when compared to the previous year total of 13,629.
- Arrearage Forgiveness Program: MPP May 2021 electric customers 15,717 and gas customers 14,932. Total of 30,649 a difference of +8,450 when compared to the previous year.

AVANGRID: Kathleen Wasilnak

- Matching Payment Program May 2021: Total customers for UI was 3,012. 673 were successfully matched and 690 had a balance of zero for a total success count of 1,363 (45.25%) customers. Total customers for SCG 10,426 with a total success count of 4,090 (39.23%). Total customers for CNG was 9,102 with a total success count of 3,442 (37.82%).
- We anticipate that the percentage of success rate will increase because the community action agencies' deadline is running until the middle of this month.
- Arrearage Forgiveness MPP: Total combined customers currently enrolled is 19,626 with a combined balance of \$21.6 million dollars.
- UI MAPP: 5,144 customers with a balance of about \$10 million dollars
- COVID-19 installment plan: 11, 967 total combined customers with a combined balance a little over \$14 million dollars.

Legislative update: Wendy Wanchack

- There are a couple of bills of interest, none of which have been signed to law. One is the climate change mitigation bill, with a home energy affordability piece to it. Basic language says that landlords and homeowners offering their units for sale have to provide potential buyers or tenants with information on the cost of utilities for the last 12 months. This is to help in determining the affordability of buying or renting a home if the utilities are not included in the rent.
- The second is a house bill called An Act Concerning Electric Suppliers and it is proposing that there be no fees to transfer an account due to a move by a tenant or homeowner if they are

receiving service from a particular electric supplier. It is also giving PURA the opportunity to tweak their acquired ability to put certain customers on the standard offer.

- The third is bill 356: An Act Establishing an Energy Efficiency Retrofit Grant Program for Affordable Housing. This tries to provide funding to local housing authorities and others to update their energy efficiency.
- An Act Concerning Utility Company Text Message Communication this bill requires utilities to send a text message communication about any written information sent to customers including termination notices.
- Finally, An Act to establish a Taskforce to study electric distribution companies and the purpose of this act is to increase accountability to rate payers and be more responsive to rate payer needs when it comes to the distribution companies that are out there.

Wendy Wanchak: I suggest that we form a group within this group to start looking at some of these legislative policies because we have a responsibility as LIEAB to make recommendations and comment about the legislation that is coming before the Connecticut legislature each year.

Nora Duncan: I wanted to comment on the act concerning electric suppliers, that bill does a couple of thing around the third party supplier that AARP has been advocating for years. We did negotiate a key component to ban the auto renewal for all third party electric supplier contracts. That's how we got it through the House on 142 to 0 vote but now some of the actors in the third party supply market are actively lobbying the Senate to kill it. The parts they don't like are the elimination of all cancelation fees on third party electric supply bills. So that if you get into one and realize it's bad it does not cost you more to get out of it than to stay in. Requirement that suppliers provide the consumer with an estimated average monthly bill when being offered a contract and the elimination of variable rate contracts.

PURA Dockets: Frank Augeri

- 20R315 Docket concerning the emergency utility shutoff moratorium: we continue to review the companies' termination plans and call center recoding. Just recently, PURA approved EOE's motion to allow the electric and gas companies to begin the termination process for non-residential customers. Non-residential customers will be subject to termination no sooner than June 15 this year. We also submitted a motion for additional penalties against each of the Avangrid companies, which was just approved. Previously EOE had recommended NOV against UI, Connecticut Water and Eversource electric and gas. The latest NOV against Avangrid were for \$10 thousand dollars each and the way we structured them was that \$500 went to the State and the rest goes to Operation Fuel.
- Energy affordability docket 17-12-03 RE01: Some of you were at the last tactical meeting on May 18. This was a working group in which we discuss the companies' recent filings regarding the stream lining of the medical portal. We received some comments from board members here from their organizations. We also issued some interrogatories based on the discussions that occurred at the tactical meeting. EOE would have to submit a report to PURA by July 1 with our recommendations, so it is an ongoing process.
- 17-12-03 RE11 New rate designs: This includes the low-income discount rate discussion. The Authority has broken it into 4 different phases. Phase 1A is a review of Eversource's 30 small business rates. Phase 1B is the consideration of a proposed settlement agreement from UI.

Phase 2A deals with interim rate decrease discussions while Phase 2b is the focus on low-income discount rates. The three phases apart from the low-income discount rate have had hearings either held or will be convened in June. The low-income discount rate does not have hearings schedule because the Authority is still expecting to receive discovery by July 9.

6. New Business

Updating Board List: Brenda Watson

- *We have been trying to update the member list for some time now, so if you are a new or returning member and you notice that on the DEEP website your information is wrong regarding your agency. Please send me a note and I will get it over to Starley so that he can update the list.*
- *There are no bylaws for this board. The only governing tool is the language in statute but we do have ability as a board to get together and draw up our own bylaws.*
- *Wendy Wanchak has volunteered to chair a subcommittee that will be responsible for developing bylaws.*
- *This will answer some questions around the process of approving the LIHEAP plan, the public participation process and more.*
- *If you are interested in participating in the subcommittee please reach out to me and I will share them with Wendy.*

Carlene Taylor: You mentioned the LIHEAP process, does this mean that this will change the process?

Brenda Watson: No, we are just looking to have written documentation about the process.

Carlene Taylor: Who is allowed to join the subcommittee since there are voting and non-voting members as well as members who are not in the board?

Brenda Watson: Only voting and non-voting members on the board are allowed to participate.

Danielle Palladino: I just wanted to offer my support for the subcommittee as the person who works with the agencies to get all the block grants through the OPM review process and over to the Governor's office I can fill in many of the blanks.

Carlene Taylor: DSS would also like to provide support.

7. Public Comments

None

8. Adjournment

Motion by: Wendy Wanchak.

Second by: Deb Polun

Next meeting date: Wednesday, August 4, 2021