

## Low Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting

Wednesday, April 6, 2022, 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM (EDT)

### 1. Call to Order

Chairperson Brenda Watson called the meeting to order at 1:35 PM. Remote meeting held via Microsoft Teams.

### 2. Attendance

Members Present: *Brenda Watson, Wendy Wanchak, Nora Duncan, Deb Polun, Rosemary Lopez, Chris Herb, Joy Hollister, Lisa Rosso, Joanne Whistnant, Ruth Swift, Tyra Peluso, Frank Augeri, Jaime Soto, Kathleen Wasilnak, Nicole Lawton, Victoria Hackett, Cassandra Norfleet-Johnson, Danielle Palladino.*

Members Absent: *Theresa Washington,*

Host: *Starley Arias, Claire Sickinger*

Guest: *Nickie Kollie, Tonya Anderson, Owen Rood, Linette Pisani, Joanne Balashak, Alyson Ayotte, Ashley Marshall, Kyle Ellsworth, Giulia Bambara, Gannon Long, Brittany Wyman, Brian Biernat, Laura Robidoux, Tammy Wilson, Yveson Cassamajor, Kenyetta Risser-Lovings, Kimberly White Lissette Andino.*

### 3. Minutes for Approval

*Minutes for Wednesday, February 2, 2022*

*Motion by: Wendy Wanchack*

*Second by: Chris Herb*

*Abstained: None*

*Opposed by: None*

### 4. Nominating Committee:

Per Article III - Section 3.3 of the LIEAB By-Laws, "**Term of Office.** *The Chair and Vice-Chair of the boards shall each serve a two-year term and may not serve more than three consecutive terms of office. Term of office shall align with fiscal year unless resignation.*" Chairperson Brenda Watson and Vice-Chair Wendy Wanchack have completed their two-year terms and are not seeking another term.

Vice Chair Wendy Wanchak announced the nominee for Chairperson of the Board as Deb Polun and the nominee for Vice-Chair as Nora Duncan. No other nominations were made.

*Acceptance of the nominees*

*Motion by: Wendy Wanchak*

*Second by: Chris Herb*

*Abstained by: None*

*Opposed by: None*

Motioned carried and Brenda Watson passed the leadership of the board to Chairperson Deb Polun.

## 5. Old Business/ Program Updates

### ***LIHEAP/CEAP Update: Cassandra Norfleet-Johnson & Linette Pisani***

#### *Application Data Overview August 2, 2021 – April 2, 2022*

- Year to Date Total: 86,160 applications taken
  - 70,218 Applications approved (combined fuel/utility/rental)
  - 13,080 Applications denied.
  - 21,609 in Crisis Assistance
  - 10,000 in Safety Net
  - Overall approval rate of 81.4 percent.

Linette Pisani stated that applications increased by 7 percent from this time last season with an approval increase of 28.6 percent. The fix margin price has also increased from 35 cents to 45 cents due to change in fuel prices and does not include the county differentials.

Linette stated that the numbers are reflecting positively on the changes made by the department to streamline processes and coordination with the Community Action Agencies.

Chris Herb commented on the volatility of fuel prices and thanked the State's quick response to address the concerns of the vendors.

*Brittany Wyman screen-shared the Consolidated CAA Report by CEAP application submission type.*

Brittany Wyman: why are we able to get pending versus denied in other reports but not in this one?

Linette Pisani explained that the system did not recognize phone applications as pending due to missing signatures or necessary documentation and would issue a denial letter.

Brittany Wyman asked what do applications in progress versus applications pending mean?

Linette Pisani explained that applications in progress are applications received and entered into the system but have not been certified as approved or denied by the CAA and applications pending are applications that were started but have not been processed.

### ***Operation Fuel Update: Tonya Anderson***

#### Winter 21 -Spring 22 Program Season

- 7,164 households have been serviced.
  - 2,536 were customers that applied either through the Field Bank or the online portal.
  - 154 customers from BNC Building Neighborhoods Together formerly known as Bridgeport Neighborhood Trust
  - 4,349 customers from the Eversource Gas NOV Hardship.
  - 125 customers from the Cherry Street Lofts in Bridgeport CT.

- Total amount spent \$3,128,955
- Fiscal Year 21-22 served 9,265 applicants to date. In comparison Fiscal Year 20-21 served 5,520 applicants.

Tyra Peluso stated that depending on the application numbers in May, there might be an extension until June 10<sup>th</sup>.

**Matching Payment Program Update:**

**Eversource Program Updates: Joanne Whistnant**

- *New Start Forgiveness January 1 – March 31*
  - *11,015 customers for 2022 in comparison to 8,260 customers in 2021, a difference of 2,755.*
- *Matching Payment Program (MPP) as of March 31, 2022*
  - *13,556 electric customers*
  - *13,432 gas customers*
  - *Total of 26,988*
- *Arrearage Forgiveness Program*
  - *February 2022 total 44,684*
  - *February 2021 total 39,343*
  - *Difference of 5,341*

**Avangrid Program Update: Jaime Soto**

- *Matching Payment Program March 2022*
  - *UI had 3,554 customers with a balance of \$6,110,172*
  - *CNG almost 12,000 customers with a balance of \$16 million*
  - *SGC had a little over 14,000 customers with a balance of \$17 million*
  - *Overall total of 29,530 customers with a balance of \$39.2 million*
- *Forgiveness Program MaPP*
  - *UI had 5,769 customers with a balance of \$10.6 million*
- *COVID -19 Active Payment Plan*
  - *UI had 11,161 customers with a balance of \$13.4 million*
  - *CNG had 4,573 customers with a balance of \$5.9 million*
  - *SGC had 7,213 customers with a balance of \$7.7 million*
  - *Overall total of 22,947 customers with a balance of \$27 million.*

**6. New Business**

**LIHEAP Subcommittee**

Joy Hollister explained that the LIHEAP Subcommittee is formed to review the LIHEAP Allocation Plan and develop a proposal with recommendations for improvement. The final proposal would be voted on by LIEAB and submitted to DSS for consideration.

Wendy Wanchak added that in the past, many of the recommendations made by the subcommittee have been incorporated to the plan.

Deb Polun added that the assignment to the subcommittee is a short-term assignment with the goal of having the recommendations completed by the June meeting.

Cassandra Norfleet Johnson, Lynette Pisani, Joy Hollister, Danielle Palladino, Ruth Swift, Kimberly White, Chris Herb, Deb Polun, Jaime Soto and Brittany Wyman volunteered to be on the LIHEAP Subcommittee.

Nora Duncan stated that she would send an email to all the participants to get them started.

Joy Hollister was identified as the Chair of the LIHEAP Subcommittee.

### **Policy Committee Update**

Wendy Wanchak provided a quick update on the policy subcommittee.

- The Policy Committee has identified four priorities for the board.
- The committee is drafting a document that deals with the issue of information sharing for financial hardships to present to the board.

Wendy announced that she is retiring from CLS and this would be her last board meeting.

### **Legislative Update: Nora Duncan**

HB 5342: An Act Concerning Membership of the Low-Income Energy Advisory Board.

Nora stated that the bill requested that the Human Services Committee increase the membership of the board to diversify the groups represented.

Nora continued to state that this act could avoid the problem of finding chairs for the board after the current chairs' terms are over and that having a larger board can provide a better representation of the communities served.

The bill has been given a joint favorable vote from the committee to the floor and is awaiting a vote.

HB 5041: An Act Concerning Home Energy Affordability For Home Renters

This is a Governor's Bill that requires that information on energy affordability of a rental home or apartment is provided to renters. Starting in the largest cities with the least energy efficient rental stock and moves out over the course of several years, also increasing energy efficiency in these homes.

This bill is awaiting action in the House.

Victoria Hackett stated this has been something that DEEP has a sponsored in the past and was taken up by the governor's office. We've done a lot of work on this bill and we're excited to have seen it come out of the Housing Committee for renters.

Joy Hollister: *Is it that this information is public information or is it only available to the renters?*

Victoria Hackett: *I think it requires that it be provided with a listing, but it doesn't necessarily link to a database, which I think is more what you're talking about. That is definitely something I think a lot of people are interested in seeing happen, but it will probably take some more time.*

Gannon Long commented - *This is important. The idea of this bill is to make the information available to the renter so that person has the information needed to help make an informed decision before renting.*

### **Weatherization Assistance Program Presentation: Kenyetta Risser-Lovings**

*Victoria Hackett introduced the Director of the Office of Affordable Housing Energy Retrofit Kenyetta Risser-Lovings. The new office has been established in DEEP, pursuant to the ARPA programs and SB356: An Act Establishing An Energy Efficiency Retrofit Grant Program for Affordable Housing. The DEEP weatherization team has been moved under the Office of Affordable Housing Energy Retrofit.*

*Kenyetta Risser-Lovings presented on the Connecticut Weatherization Assistance (WAP) Program PY22 State Plan.*

#### **Presentation Overview:**

- **WAP Federal Rules and Regulations**
  - *mission and a purpose for weatherization programs is to bring the benefits of energy efficiency improvements to overburdened households.*
  - *Connecticut is required to comply to the federal guidelines.*
- **WAP Programmatic Updates**
  - *The programmatic updates focused on the quality work plan to align to DOE standard work specifications, updating the policies and procedures for quality assurance and quality control inspections as well as the policies and procedures for training and technical assistance.*
  - *Additional focus on health and safety, updating the weatherization operations and training manual, health and safety plan, health and safety guidance, and a training needs assessment for the PY22 health and safety plan.*
- **PY22 Financial Projections**
  - *The total budget allocation is estimated at \$3.4 million.*
  - *Subgrantee allocation estimated at \$2.8 million*
  - *Statewide unit goal estimated at 250.*
- **Barriers to Program Implementation**
  - *Data collected from needs assessment and sub-grantee reports to identify 4 prominent barriers to delivery. (1) Economic shock from COVID-19, (2) Staff attrition and illness, (3) Lack of formal DOE approval for DEEP to weatherize income-eligible multi-family housing, (4) Health and Safety Barriers.*
- **Barrier Removal Through Program Delivery**
  - *DEEP proposed solutions for each barrier to the program implementation. (1) utilize existing cost data, contracting and construction best practices to buffer against market volatilities. (2) Create incentives to attract competitive talent and retain current*

*employees. (3) Develop programmatic and technical infrastructure for increases in staffing and operations over PY22. (4) Create a pipeline for weatherization projects.*

- *Pathway to Building Electrification*
  - *Step 1: barrier remediation*
  - *Step 2: deploy energy efficiency through WAP and HES-IE*
  - *Step 3: guide the projects into solar and storage and shared clean energy facilities*
  - *Step 4: adoption of heat pumps and EV Charging technologies.*
- *There will be two public hearings on April 20, 2022. The written comment period ends on April 30, 2022, and the submission of the updated PY22 state plan and budget is scheduled for May 3, 2022.*

Presentation slides were provided to LIEAB board members and guest prior to the board meeting.

Deb Polun asked about the length of the program year.

Kenyetta Risser-Lovings stated that the program year is July 1<sup>st</sup> 2022 to June 30<sup>th</sup> 2023.

Owen Rood: *For the barriers to remediation work do we have to carry forward the \$1 million that we had in the LIHEAP budget for weatherization?*

Victoria Hackett: *I think our thought was that we should focus for the remainder of the LIHEAP program year. There is a complicating factor because the LIHEAP program year and the WAP program year don't align, so as we launch the weatherization barrier program, we should focus on the non-LIHEAP related funds because the main funding is from the ARPA funding. We'll be looking at not leveraging the LIHEAP 2022 program year funds but the LIHEAP 2023 program year.*

Cassandra Norfleet-Johnson in response to Owen stated that the MOA has been sent to DEEP for review and that DSS will make sure to add it as a discussion item.

### **Public Comments**

Chris Herb commented on Carlene Taylor's retirement from DSS and her service to the Low-Income Energy Advisory Board. Stating that Carlene was always a consummate professional and acknowledging the importance of her role on the board.

Other board members acknowledge the comments and sentiment.

### **Adjournment**

*Motion to Adjourn the meeting*

*Motion by: Ruth Swift*

*Second by: Chris Herb*

*No opposition*

*Meeting adjourned at 2:46 PM.*

Next meeting is scheduled for June 1, 2022, at 1:30 PM via Microsoft Teams.