

Low Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting

Wednesday , December 6, 1:33pm-2:58pm

Minutes (Draft)

Members in attendance: Claire E. Coleman (Chair), Nora Duncan (Vice Chair), Nicole Lawton (designee for Marissa Gillet), , Kathleen Wasilnak, , Nicole Grant (designee for Marissa Gillett) Jessica Gouveia and Brooke Parker (designee for Claire E. Coleman), Gannon Long, Nicole Lawton (designee for Lisa Tepper-Bates) , Katie Wilt, Matthew Dillon, Ruth Swift, Christian Herb, Richard Hanratty , April Salazar, Bonnie Roswig, (designee Martha Stone), Rhonda Evans, Victoria Hackett (designee for Katie Dykes), Cassandra Norfleet-Johnson (designee for Andrea Barton Reeves) , Zani Imetovski, Yessenia Santiago-Bejarano

Absent: Lisa Rosso, Jaime Soto, Theresa Washington, Joanne Whistnant, Alicia Dolce, Angel Battle Greg Kirschner

Agenda Item	Discussion
1. Roll call	Y. Santiago-Bejarano- collected via chat.
2. Approve minutes	Motion to Approve by the Minutes by Christian Herb and second by Gannon Long with no objections or abstentions.
3. Public comments	No members of the public presented comments.
4. Program Updates a. CEAP b. Operation Fuel c. Eversource d. Avangrid e. OCC Heating Burden Analysis f. Discussion on energy assistance programs/enrollment/funding/need	<p>a. CEAP- (report by Cassandra Norfleet Johnson, DSS) See the report here. Currently, the data is for the period ending on 11/25/23, we are working backwards with the reporting due to internal technical issues. The second page reflects the number of applications approved and we are working to provide data by fuel types. We have received 90% of estimated allocated funds from the government.</p> <p><u>Q&A:</u> Question: Claire Coleman, Chairwoman: When is the remaining 10% released, in spring? Answer: Cassandra Norfleet Johnson, DSS) – Yes, in the spring.</p> <p>b. Operation Fuel- (report by Gannon Long) See Report Here. Introduced Interim CEO Roxanna Booth-. Ms. Booth introduced herself. July 1st is the start of the fiscal year, the data reflected is from 8/1/23-12/4/23 and are estimates not final numbers. Operation Fuel will re-open January 8th, 2024. Similar to DSS we have increased demand in our program, we received the same number of applicants last year but in 2 months' time frame. We anticipate that we can only be open for 8 weeks at a time due to high</p>

Low Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting

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Agenda Item	Discussion
	<p>demand. Electricity is the most popular assistance, delivered fuel also includes for propane. The Water Program runs all year round however, MDC funds ran out at a delicate time of year. Due to the great partnership with MDC, they have increased funding and the program remains available to provide assistance. Operation Fuel published Affordability Gap Study, press conference at the LOB, RM 1C at 11AM tomorrow 12/7/23.</p> <p><u>Q&As:</u> Q: Zani Imetovski, OPM- Would the Low Income Discount rate impact the demand for utility assistance for electricity? A: Gannon Long, Op. Fuel- Yes, this will impact the bills, it is important to keep in mind with the gap of what people can afford to pay and increase has been increase of 37%, and there is huge number of uncollectible amounts. A reduction in energy assistance will take some time. Q: Christian Herb, designee of the Independent CT Petroleum Assoc., Has the department determined the possible expenditure amount and where that money will be deployed? <i>Comment by Chairwoman Claire Coleman: this question is better directed to Eversource and UI. If the anticipated cost of Low-Income Discount rate results in lower demand for energy assistance program, this will take time see the results. Also, I want to clarify that the LIDR is paid for by all ratepayers so the discount low-income customers receive is spread across the electric bill, so that should be taken into account when determining savings</i></p> <p>c. Eversource – Kathleen Wasilnak- noted she could read Eversource numbers but can't provide answers. Chairwoman Claire Coleman, noted we could table Eversource report, until Eversource can present.</p> <p>d. Avangrid (Kathleen Wasilnak) See report here. Reviewed the data for participants in the Matching Payment program, Bill Forgiveness Program, Covid-19 Payment Plan, and Flexible Payment Arrangements. Will need to review this data as the year on the report may be incorrect. The Low-Income Discount rate is kicking in</p>

Low Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting

Wednesday , December 6, 1:33pm-2:58pm

Agenda Item	Discussion
	<p>the month of December. Don't think we can provide estimates on enrollment data as we are still getting the number of customers enrolled into Low Income Discount Rate program.</p> <p><u>Comment:</u> Comment: Christian Herb, designee of the Independent CT Petroleum Assoc.,- it would be a good idea to project numbers, and this is a historic move by the state with Low-Income Discount Rate.</p> <p>Response: (Kathy Wasilnak)- it will take a while to see change as the arrearages impact the need for assistance on electric accounts.</p> <p>Chairwoman Claire Coleman: request for more detailed for next meeting in Feb. 2024.</p> <p><u>e. OCC Heating Burden Analysis:</u> presented by Chairwoman Claire Coleman. See report here. This report was put together in response to LIEAB request for additional state funding and by the request by Senator Blumenthal. The report was gathered with the use of LIEAB and CEAP Reports in addition to other factors. Thank you to Alex Wang who put together the data presented. The presentation's aim is to assess: How do we determine if there is a gap [in funding] to address the energy burden of residents. The report reflects that no more than 2.5% of CT residents' total income be used to meet the heating needs. "If deliverable fuel costs are the same as they were last winter, OCC estimates that Connecticut could need an additional \$26.2 to \$31.6 million of funding for winter heating costs in 2023-24 or if current deliverable fuel costs hold and stay at 15% less than they were last winter, OCC estimates that Connecticut could need an additional \$15.3 to \$19.8 million of funding for winter heating costs in 2023-24. Benefits shortfall based on difference between CEAP recipients' projected heating costs and heating costs under a 2.5% heating burden" (slide deck pg. 2) in addition to the full use of DSS funds, a 5-month heating season, low- income discount rate being applied and same number of applicants of est. of 116K. The report shows that electricity has the highest monthly usage for heating. The report also addresses Heating Cost based on Fuel Prices, oil price scenarios as well as arrearages and shut-off notices. Alex Wang noted Fuel oil prices were biggest driver behind the funding deficit, disproportionately short fall when compared to</p>

Low Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting

Wednesday , December 6, 1:33pm-2:58pm

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	<p>electricity. The data considers last year’s average prices from DSS and the fixed marginal prices vs. regular price that covered by CEAP benefits. Large variability in the short fall of 2%-3% range in oil prices excluding weather as an unpredictable factor.</p> <p>Arrearages indicate energy affordability challenges, the data presented reflects shut-off account variations i.e.. some clients may be disconnected and then reconnected, and another customer may be shut off.</p> <p>Other Assistance for Electricity, low Income discount rate, utility assistance programs, energy efficiency programs and operation fuel/ <u>Q&A & Comments:</u> Comment: (Kathleen Wasilnak, UI) indicated we won’t know the cost or savings yet in this program [low-income discount rate] but the data will be collected and continue to work with PURA to define the goal of the program which are designed to be at the 6% energy burden.</p> <p>Q: Nora-Duncan, Vice Chairwoman–Do the Natural Gas Companies have a rate increase in front of PURA, do they have Low Income Discount Rate. Do we know when that might be in effect?</p> <p>A: Chairwoman Claire Coleman- We don’t know the effective date but sometime in 2024, a full year away but yes the Docket is in front of PURA. The OCC team is evaluating the gas companies LIDR proposals. Natural Gas is much smaller number of customers as compared to electric and has high number of Low-Income members.</p> <p><u>f. Discussion on Energy Assistance Programs/enrollment/funding need</u></p> <p>Comment: Vice Chairwoman Nora Duncan indicated that there is a built-in fiscal cliff of sort here in that those at 61% SMI are also impacted greatly by energy burden, but there needs to be a set cut off.</p> <p>Q: Nicole Lawton, (designee for Infoline) -Is there anything available or in the works for households that have a higher energy burden but have an income that is considered too high for Operation Fuel, CEAP, etc.?</p> <p>A: Chairwoman Claire Coleman- Op. Fuel income allowance is more lenient.</p> <p>A: Gannon Long, Op. Fuel- Currently, no change to income guides right now, but there is consideration to reduce them as the demand is higher.</p>

Low Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting

Wednesday , December 6, 1:33pm-2:58pm

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	<p>A: Cassandra Norfleet Johnson, DSS- CEAP is federally tied to income requirements which is 60% income level, we do not have plans to expand income requirements.</p> <p>Q: Nora Duncan, VP Chairwoman: When you look at the analysis with funding that has been committed to CEAP, what are some the conclusions, where do we stand in terms of meeting need this heating season?</p> <p>Comments & Question: Chairwoman Claire Coleman: One of the relevant data points DSS shared, what is the burn down rate of general benefit and looks like 7.5% increase in applications but also a larger percentage in apps approved – due to either streamlined app and getting people through process more quickly, but also be demand issue as well. Do you have thoughts on those trends?</p> <p>A: Cassandra Norfleet Johnson, DSS: We can't make that full determination as this was the first year of an online application and we need to allow time for the data to drive the information and create a work group in estimate of April/May 2024 and allow for the winter time.</p> <p>Comment: Bonnie Roswig, (designee for The Center for Children's Advocacy)- there will be a need of explosion of assistance when shut off notices go out. What is critical as people apply for support via CAA and municipalities is that they are educated on the appropriate programs to determine to be successful by Dec. 1st.</p> <p>Reply: Cassandra Norfleet Johnson, DSS: I want to message correctly. CAAs and municipalities spend time and educate people about various programs. Need to look to 211 website with heating help website to include level of information, working collaboratively to push message of great programs and how we are linking them all together. Need to link support together and identify if there are any gaps.</p> <p>Chairwoman, Claire Coleman: Thanks Cassie – last chance for other input. Uncertain future. What role state should play? – all information and discussion helpful to figure out strategy going forward.</p> <p>Chair Coleman pointed out that  supplemental from the Feds. seems unlikely but it is still on the table and keep pushing towards getting the money. </p> <p>Comment: Zani Imetovski, OPM, - CEAP is a federally funding program, we should continue to apply pressure on the federal government.</p>

Low Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting

Wednesday , December 6, 1:33pm-2:58pm

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	<p>Christian Herb, designee of the Independent CT Petroleum Assoc., I disagree, pressure needs to be put on both places state and federal, and last year the legislature agreed to back fill if Fed. Gov't did not. The state needs to put some skin in the game.</p> <p>Zani Imetovski, OPM- It's a challenge in that is not a budget year and it is a federal program.</p> <p>Christian Herb, designee of the Independent CT Petroleum Assoc.,- it was the position of this board to ask for funding from the state.</p> <p>Nora Duncan, Vice Chairwomen: it was a position this board took and we have a lot of policy and budget experience on this board. Our job is to advocate as we see fit and then the legislature and the administration make the final decisions.</p>
<p>5. New Business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Revisions to LIEAB authorizing statute b. LIHEAP Action Day in Washington, D.C. c. Proposed new date/location for next meeting Feb. 14th. 	<p>a. Revisions to LIEAB authorizing statute.</p> <p>Chairwoman Claire Coleman- it is time to codify the statute to include LIHWAP, time frame on the bottom- of the slides allows for a more proactive time frame.</p> <p>Comment: Rich Hanratty, (CT Water & Sewer Department) looked at this language and voted to approve it back in the November meeting, in the Water Association meeting.</p> <p>Cassandra Norfleet Johnson, DSS- Lots of public water authorities did not want to participate. Additionally, DSS, DEEP, and OPM, we do not have authority over Water Companies.</p> <p>Comment: April Salazar, Town of Manchester- did participate in the water discussion in support of amending the language.</p> <p>Cassandra Norfleet Johnson, DSS - we had Public Water Authorities who refused to participate in the program. We should have water subject experts in this area.</p> <p>April Salazar- grey area with city authorities, advocacy lobbying group known as AWA that can educate the staff. Some of the water companies who did not participate were due to staffing and billing updates.</p>

Low Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting

Wednesday , December 6, 1:33pm-2:58pm

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	<p>Chairwoman Claire Coleman, companies are not regulated by PURA, there are different regulatory bodies. Agrees in pulling other agencies.</p> <p>Matthew Dillon (designee CT legal Services)- is there a timeline on approval, wants to change Number 7 as CT Legal Aid is now 3 different agencies.</p> <p>Chairwoman Claire Coleman- was hoping to get the changes approved today so we can work it through the legislative committees in advance of the 2024 Session.</p> <p>Christian Herb, designee of the Independent CT Petroleum Assoc., agreed to support a motion to approve the changes in the LIEAB statute noting Matt Dillions request for technical language change.</p> <p>Christian Herb, designee of the Independent CT Petroleum Assoc., - motion and Second by Rich Hanratty – no objections or abstentions. Motion passed.</p> <p>b. LIHEAP Action Day –Gannon Long, Op. Fuel - day to advocate in Washington in collaboration with NAWA. Op Fuel and Eversource and UI went in Feb. Powerful for more agencies CAA/state advocates to go down together as a delegation. Massachusetts went and had 30 people present. Great opportunity to relationship build. If anyone is interested in attending, please let the secretary know.</p> <p>c. Proposed new date/location for next meeting: Our next meeting is on Feb 7th which is the same date as LIHEAP Action day in Washington DC. We will change the next meeting date to Feb 14th. The new meeting date will be in person at LOB- will need to work on coordinating and presentations in Low Income Discount Rate and Legislature may be in attendance.</p>
<p>6. Agency Updates on Docketed &/or Legislative Matters</p>	<p>DEEP (Victoria Hackett)- REPS program (funding through LIEAB) An analysis of the program data will be provided during the December 13th Energy efficiency Board Meeting. The report will indicate barriers in the REPS Program and number of home evaluations completed by iCast.</p>

Low Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting

Wednesday , December 6, 1:33pm-2:58pm

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7. Public Comment	<p>Senator Matt Lesser: Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. Thank you to the Board for putting out a bold ask of the state to fund 20% of LIEAB’s costs. I listened to Zani’s comments and his concerns. It is important for us to deal with a short-term problem. It would be great if the state could provide a long-term plan. Last Friday, it was communicated to me by members of the CT delegation that there will be no supplemental funding. We will need more time to see the results of the Low-Income Discount Rate. If there is unallocated ARPA money, this funding source could be used for Short Term relief money for LIEAB and can be further discussed with OPM and DSS to assist in short term assistance. We can make the case with OPM that this is a one-time commitment. I urge you to re-up your ask before your next meeting in Feb. 2024. I, Co-Chair of the Human Services Committee – is it possible to better coordinate assistance through LIEAP, Operation Fuel? Is there a common application for both programs? Currently the application is being reviewed in the Human Services Committee to streamline one application for the programs in Human Services.</p> <p>Comments: Chairwomen Claire Coleman thanked Senator Matt Lesser for his suggestions.</p>
8. Adjournment	2:58pm Motion by Nora Duncan and Ruth Swift.

Meeting Schedule:

December 6, 2023	April 3, 2024	July (legislative session; no meeting)
February 14, 2024	June 5, 2024	August 7, 2024