

**Low-Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting
Wednesday, August 7, 2024, from 1:30PM -2:46PM
Recorded via Zoom and Broadcasted via CT-N**

[Zoom Recording link](#)

Approved Minutes

Attendance: Claire Coleman and designees Kimberly White and Brooke Parker, Nora Duncan, Theresa Washington, Joanne Whistnant, Kathleen Wasilnak (designee for Avangrid), Frank Augeri, Gannon Long and designee Mike Turaj, Nicole Lawton, Jannine Tarentello, Matthew Dillon, Christian Herb, April Salazar, Rhonda Evans and designee Kelly Hall, Victoria Hackett, Cassandra Norfleet Johnson, Yessenia Santiago-Bejarano

Absent: Jaime Soto, Lydia Santiago, Rich Hanratty, Alicia Dolce, Bonnie Roswig, Sarah White, Zani Imetovski

Chairwoman Claire Coleman called the meeting to order at 1:30PM.

| Agenda Item | Discussion |
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| 1. Roll Call | Chairwoman Claire Coleman completed Roll Call as DEEP Secretary had technical difficulties. |
| 2. Approval of 6/5/24 Meeting Minutes | Chairwoman called for motion to approve the <u>Minutes of 6/5/24 meeting</u> , Christian Herb moved the motion, second by Joanne Whistnant. No objections. Kathy Wasilnak Abstained. |
| 3. Public Comments | none |
| 4. DSS Presentation of 2025 LIHEAP Plan a. Discussion b. Review and approve LIEWAB Recommendations on 2025 LIHEAP Plan | <p>a. Discussion: Chairwoman Coleman requested DSS to provide a brief overview of the <u>LIHEAP Plan</u> as LIEWAB submits recommendations regarding the plan to the Committees of Cognizance, in advance of the public hearing which, is August 13th. Chairwoman Coleman noted great participation and quorum in the August 6th Ad-Hoc Working Group.</p> <p>Cassandra Norfleet Johnson-DSS: Grateful for board review and comment on the plan. DSS wants to be mindful to all. The dollar amounts assumed for 2025 are level funding from 2024. DSS will provide basic benefits for households, additional crisis benefits, and has identified resource for DEEP in the plan. The pricing structure for oil payments in the plan is the same as last year because the General Assembly has created a LIHEAP Working Group to address the pricing structure and DSS will not make changes until the Working Group is completed. There are not large changes this year, basic benefits for utility heated and deliverable fuel households for all levels were reviewed for vulnerable and non-vulnerable households (<u>referenced on pg 8</u>)</p> |

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Vulnerable households are identified as households where someone is identified as disabled, households with children under the age 6 years old or households with persons over the age of sixty. Rental Assistance Benefits were discussed and [referenced on page 9](#) in the plan. Crisis Benefits for deliverable fuel household that are risk of losing heat, DSS will try to offer households up to three (3) crisis benefits payments. DSS, noted households may apply online as early as September 1st and on September 3rd for in - person applications due to the holiday; however, the program date is November 1st for benefits.

Questions, Answers, Comments

Q: Theresa Washington, Eversource: Is there a different application process or qualification for second or third crisis benefit? Is September 1st online application only for deliverable fuel types? The additional crisis benefit payment will assist Op. Fuel, as it might allow dollars to go further in that program as customers are still eligible in the CEAP program.

A: Cassandra Norfleet Johnson, DSS: The customer will only need to call the Community Action Agency (CAA) and request authorization for the additional crisis benefit, as the customer has already been qualified. Customers just need to apply as we (DSS) are fuel blind.

Q: Gannon Long, Op. Fuel- Page six of the plan referenced collecting data to determine energy burdens, is that information compiled somewhere, and can it be accessed by the public?

A: Cassandra Norfleet Johnson, DSS: The information is required by HHS. Once that information becomes available, DSS will share the 2023 report with this group and it will be accessible on the DSS website.

Comment: Gannon Long, Op. Fuel: We are working with CT Green Bank for data mapping

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to see where there may be gaps and DSS information will be helpful.

Q: Chris Herb, CEMA: There is a reference to Public Act 23-204, Section 295 that requires regional pricing standards and day of pricing. Where do I find that in the document?

A: DSS: I don't believe there is a reference to that in this document. DSS discussed this section and since there is a LIHEAP working group with representatives of key sectors to determine this issue, DSS is of the opinion that it would be administratively burdensome to change this section for one month/year and then have the results of the working group. DSS believes the working group will be successful and will await feedback from the legislature.

Comment- Chris Herb, CEMA: mentioned it is the second year that this section hasn't been included. It is important to mention the public has still not been included in the plan. We look forward to participating in the working group.

Comment: Chairwoman Coleman- Requesting clarification, the determination by DSS was to not change the pricing protocols in light of the fact that the legislature ordered a working group to consider how to do that. DSS believes it would be premature to declare a methodology without the input of the working group.

Response: DSS: Yes.

Q: Nicole Lawton, Infoline: When will customers be able to start calling to schedule appoints, will that begin Sept. 3rd.

A: (by DSS)- there is a meeting with CAA's and DSS on 8/9/24 to plan program details and the scheduling of appointments.

b. Review and approve LIEWAB Recommendations on 2025 LIHEAP Plan
Chairwoman Coleman summarized the recommendations of the plan noting the board took a targeted approach, taking into consideration the current timing and that

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| | <p>several programs are in transition right now. The board also incorporated changes from the Working Group and federal allocation amounts. Chairwoman Coleman highlighted the concept of disbursing supplemental assistance earlier in the summer based on historical carry forwards, while recognizing there is not a formal cooling assistance program for CT. Another highlight is process improvement in the application process to include the CEAP application on the DSS master/common benefits application. CAA representative Rhonda Evans expressed concerns about the feasibility and impacts of a singular application. Chairwoman Coleman called for interest in a working group to address feasibility and logistical concerns of a singular application, as a legislative report is due in October. This working group would convene toward the end of this month. Participants can email the DEEP secretary or reach out to the Chair directly.</p> <p>Chairwoman Coleman requested motion to approve <u>LIEWAB Recommendations</u>, Christian Herb called for a motion that was seconded by Kathleen Wasilnak. No Objections or Abstentions, unanimous approval of the LIEWAB recommendations.</p> <p>Comment: Vice Chairwoman Nora Duncan, those wishing to testify online or in person for the public hearing must register on the General Assembly website.</p> |
| <p>5. Energy Assistance Program Updates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. DSSb. Operation Fuelc. Eversourced. Avangrid | <p>a. DSS presented <u>CEAP applications</u> noting there is a drop in applications and a 3% difference in the approval rate from 2022-2023 compared to 2023-2024 (105K: 102K approved applications; 127k: 119K applications taken). DSS commended the CAAs' hard work of approving in real time. Streamlining the application process has proven successful. DSS continues to try to rule out deduplicated information on the reports and is working with sources to see true denials.</p> |

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Q: Chairwoman Coleman: Claire: Can you explain the missing income reflected on the report.

A: DSS: those are households not categorically eligible for DSS programs.

b. [Op. Fuel presented its reports.](#) The numbers have changed a little bit since May as the fiscal year closed in June. Currently accepting CT Water applications and Aquarion but MDC applications are closed. Our next report will reflect the number of applicants for Aquarion, currently there are technical issues in obtaining the data. Op. Fuel has not announced a date for the opening of the season. In beginning of September, Op. Fuel will list the start date on their website. Kenya Van Eken left the organization last month; we are working on filling the position for a Director of Assistance Programs who will work in delivering water and energy assistance programs. Op. Fuel will have a new online platform called “new org” for clients to apply online and fuel banks can access technical assistance. Training will begin before the season starts.

Q: Theresa Washington, Eversource: Is ARPA exhausted?

A: (Op. Fuel) Gannon Long- yes, \$1.75 million dollars was spent in assistance and admin. cost.

c. Eversource- Joanne Whistnant presented [Eversource report](#), providing the figures of enrollments for the matching payment plan program (MPP) that has decreased, New Start forgiveness has increased.

Q: Chairwoman Coleman: MMP participation decreased but New Start doubled, can you walk us through this change?

A: Joanne Whistnant, Eversource: Prior to going into LIDR, there was an auto enrollment in New Start Program.

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| | <p>d. Avangrid- Kathleen Wasilnak presented the Avangrid report. The report includes the month of June. There was a mini-match in July, there was an additional 1800 customers that were put back on MPP after the mini-match. There is a significant increase in BFP program as there was an adjustment in enrollment criteria so a customer could qualify sooner, and there are customers who were also auto enrolled into the BFP. Covid 19 Payment plans ended in July, and we should not have any data to report next month. Avangrid is doing customer engagement and education regarding the available programs.</p> |
| <p>6. Vote on LIEWAB Bylaws</p> | <p>As a result of passage of Public Act 24-37, we included water as well as new reporting into our By-Laws. By-laws were circulated this summer updating organization names and there were two technical changes that were sent out yesterday. The By-laws require a two-week advance review period prior to voting. Given the nature of the limited technical nature of the revisions from yesterday we have two options: 1) update the bylaws as is and circulate and vote on the technical change in our next meeting 2) waive the bylaw requirement of two weeks advance review and vote on the by-laws with the technical changes. Chris Herb moved to approve the by-laws with the technical name changes, seconded by Matthew Dillon. No objections or abstentions. Board has adopted the By-Laws.</p> |
| <p>7. Update on Legislative or PURA Docketed Matters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. P.A. 24-37, AAC THE LOW-INCOME ENERGY ADVISORY BOARD -- Update on Annual Report subcommittee and review report outline b. PURA c. DEEP d. DSS e. Other | <p>a. <u>Update on annual report</u>, presented by Chairwoman Coleman thanked the subcommittee, Chris, Ruth, Matt, and OCC team for participating in first meeting which generated the outline for the Biennial Report. The report will now include water programs and continue advocating for the federal heating program to exist in CT.</p> <p>b. <u>PURA</u>, presented by Frank Augeri. PURA approved CT Water Company Rate case, change Water rate Assistance Program from a flat discount rate to a three-tier program to</p> |

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| | <p>ensure customers pay no more than 2% of their annual income on water bills. Energy Affordability Docket has a Technical Meeting August 15th.</p> <p>c. DEEP- presented by Vicki Hacket reported on REPS spending. As of June 30th, REPS has completed 189 Units, 137 units where work is actively in progress, from ARPA dollars. We have \$7 million ARPA dollars and have spent \$2.7m of LIHEAP funding and an additional, \$860,560 submitted to DSS pending approval, in all a bit over \$3.5 million dollars. Multiple barriers were encountered, like mold, moisture, knob and tube, asbestos, and vermiculite. 49% of completed units are in are EJ communities. The average cost per unit it \$15,135.00 This update will be provided at the LOB when the LIEWAB plan is discussed.</p> <p>Q: Chairwoman Coleman: Will the numbers be provided responsive or written testimony A: (DEEP) Responsive.</p> <p>Q: Chris Herb, CEMA- seems like there is good portion of funding available, is the program at capacity or how much work can be done? A: DEEP- we are not worried about getting the work completed by the deadline.</p> <p>d. none. e. none.</p> |
| 8. Public Comments | none |
| 9. Adjournment | 2:46pm |

Upcoming Meeting Schedule:

October 2, 2024

December 4, 2024