

Low Income Energy Advisory Board Meeting  
 Wednesday, February 14, 2024, 1:30 – 2:24 pm

Minutes -Approved

*Members in attendance:* Claire E. Coleman (Chair), Nora Duncan (Vice Chair), Jaime Soto, Joanne Whistnant, Frank Augeri, Jessica Gouveia & Brooke Parker (designee’s for Claire Coleman), Gannon Long, Nicole Lawton, Katie Wilt, Matthew Dillon, Ruth Swift, Christian Herb, Nikey Kollie (designee for Christian Herb), Richard Hanratty, April Salazar, Bonnie Roswig, Rhonda Evans, Peter Hadler (designee for Cassandra Norfleet Johnson), Danielle Palladino and Nicholas Turcotte (designee for Zani Imetovski), Yessenia Santiago-Bejarano

*Absent:* Lisa Rosso, Theresa Washington, Kathleen Wasilnak, Greg Kirschner, Alicia Dolce, Angel Battle, Victoria Hackett

*Chairwoman Claire Coleman opening remarks of the LIEAB Meeting noting first in-person/ hybrid meeting since the Pandemic. Chairwomen Coleman called meeting with a formal roll call.*

Agenda Item	Discussion
1. Roll call	Y. Santiago-Bejarano
2. Approval of 12/6/23 Meeting Minutes	<p>Chairwoman Claire Coleman requested approval of 12/6/23 Minutes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Richard Hanratty noted Section 5a. New Business revisions to the authorization statue, clarifying the CT water Company, CWWA voted in Nov. meeting to approve, technical corrections, voted and approved the proposed language in the November Meeting.</li> <li>• Gannon Long, Section 4b. There is a partnership with MDC and CT Water that increased the water funding who increased the funding.</li> </ul> <p>Chairwoman Coleman noting the changes to the minutes called for any objections, with no objections noted requested a vote to approve the Dec. 6, 2023, minutes with changes requested by Rich and Gannon.</p> <p>Christian Herb, moved to approve the Minutes of 12/6/23. No objections or abstentions were made, motion was granted.</p>
3. Public Comments	<p>Chairwoman Coleman noted we have been advocating for low-income energy assistance funding – Senate has just called a bill – Senate bill 111. which awards \$13.5 million additional supplemental dollars to the CEAP program, and \$3.5 million to Operation fuel, which will allow for emergency assistance. I just really want to acknowledge those of you who are here who have been working towards obtaining additional funding. We're appreciative to the State legislative leadership and the Governor and all of our state leaders involved in energy assistance and recognizing how important it is to ensure that families and seniors who are struggling have money in their budget to pay for heating costs. It's really a public health and safety issue. So, it's a very exciting day for us, collectively as a board.</p> <p><u>Comment #1:</u> Esteemed Co-Chair of Energy and Technology, Rep. Steinberg: When I get up on a winter morning, sunny – I say it’s a good solar day, but also check the temperature – some days 50 some days its 30, I think about all the people affected by that. I thank all of those who have supported this effort</p>

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	<p>– it is important to get legislators to care. Shouldn't be this hard every year. The whole system is flawed, starting with the Feds., it puts a lot of responsibility on this board to figure out how to move forward. Hopefully the money that is being appropriated will prove to be sufficient through the heating season. Hope we get to a system where we are not struggling, having people live hand to mouth to make sure they'll get their energy assistance on an annual basis. Speaking on behalf of the legislature we need you to be the advocates to ensure we're taking care of people.</p> <p><u>Comment #2:</u> Elizabeth Vinnick, CRT, I oversee the Energy Weatherization and Affordable Housing Portfolio. Very pleased to announce that application intake has increased by 8.4% - 18,188 applications this season. A big piece of the success is the fantastic implementation of DSS's online application. Almost 23% have been through the online app. This gives CRT time to work with customers who need hand holding. Almost 11,000.00, applications have been face to face through direct site or through town partners. Looking at some quiet time – deliverable fuel applications have gone down. Many have used up the deliverable fuel benefit. Excited about the potential for increased funding. We are preparing for shutoffs and closing doors soon. Working with New Start, Eversource in particular – creating output to share with customers so they can see where the payments went and how the application has helped them. We hope to make this a model for the State; to make New Start work for full year when CEAP isn't active. CRT is also working with the utility companies with our data security initiatives – want data to be secure on both sides, we want iron clad contracts regarding security. Our call center has been working to contact customers proactively to let them know they are almost out of funds and should contact CRT. Next year we are hoping we can improve the deliverable fuel ordering process to be more efficient.</p> <p>Chairwoman Coleman thanked the members of the public.</p>

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<p>4. Energy Assistance Program Updates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. DSS-CEAP</li> <li>b. Operation Fuel</li> <li>c. Eversource</li> <li>d. Avangrid</li> </ul>	<p><b>a. <u>DSS-CEAP</u>:</b> Peter Hadler, CEAP reports were circulated prior to this meeting and are on the screen. The reports are routine recap of current status of application, volumes and obviously applications approved which equates to enrollment in the program. As we have seen, we've been slightly above last year's volume for applications that have been submitted and slightly higher on the number of applications that have been approved. Thanks to CRT and other Community Action Agencies who have helped make the online application successful. Currently seeing about 1.5% volumes for applications slightly higher than last year around the same time The number of applications approved at 6.5% this is in line with expectations. We had projected a potential increase in enrollment of 10% prior to the season, and we have built that into the benefit offerings that we have from the federally funded portion of the program.</p> <p><b><u>Q&amp;A:</u></b></p> <p>Q: Christian Herb: is there a reason we see wide variances from New Haven to Norwich? We all thought trend would be like New Haven's numbers.</p> <p>A: DSS: Ebbs and flows from one year to another. Hard to pinpoint geographical changes – saw some areas with CAA's that have higher volume increases than others. Would be interesting to look at multiyear review but nothing out of ordinary from one location to another.</p> <p>Response: Chris Herb: Sounds like this a normal variance rather than a particular issue, there is a need across the board.</p> <p>Chairwoman Claire Coleman: Before we move on – I'd like to ask for boards indulgence and break protocol – Senator Lesser just came off the floor – he has done a lot to get SB 111 to the floor and so I'd like to give him a chance to update the group as this is happening as we speak.</p> <p><b><u>Public Comment #3:</u></b></p> <p>Senator Lesser – The bill just passed the Senate 35 to nothing – I want thank this board for their advocacy and for keeping conversation going – hope funding goes out as quickly as possible. There are two different funding sources, LIHEAP funding, hoping this funding will allow for one round of crisis release payments for everyone on deliverable fuels who exhausted their benefits. There is \$3.5 million dollars for Operation Fuel, we hope that funding gets forwarded as quickly as possible but there may be some contracting issues to be resolved first. There was a discussion on the Senate floor about trying to make programs work better together and as part of the Human Services Committee, I would love to be partners with you all. Thank you for sounding alarm, this had strong bipartisan support to keep serving the most vulnerable in our state.</p>

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	<p>Response: Chris Herb: Senator we appreciate your support – bipartisan effort. Our July or August meeting, LIEAB voted to ask the State to have an annual appropriation to supplement the program. I know that obviously this is an interim budget year...going forward we would urge you and your colleagues to continue to take under advisement the long-term energy advisories, boards, recommendation to continue to provide this additional funding in light of congressional failure to act to meet these needs. Thank you for your work today. Hope your recommendation remains supported in the future.</p> <p>Response: Senator Matt Lesser : I’ve heard you loud and clear and there will be work to do to build a support around a continuous appropriation.</p> <p><u>Comment:</u> Gannon Long, Operation Fuel: thank you Senator – not every bill passes like that. Thank you for your work on this.</p> <p><u>Comment:</u> Rhonda Evans – we at CAA’s appreciate your leadership and support.</p> <p>Chairwoman Coleman – thank you Senator. And we see Senator Needleman is here – thank you for your support. With respect to Federal funding – several of us were all in DC last week lobbying Congress for more appropriations. Sounds challenging for the 2025 fiscal year, so it is helpful we are talking about this at a state level and our Congressional delegation is so supportive of this program – they are out there every day to secure more funding for LIHEAP but unfortunately it is not as bipartisan of an issue in Washington as it is here in CT.</p> <p><b>b. Operation Fuel:</b> Gannon Long, Our <a href="#">report</a> has basic numbers through the end of last week. Four thousand total applications in our system. And we've approved a little over a quarter of those. More than 70% of them are coming in from online, those take a little bit longer to manage because they may have a slightly higher error rate. About 73% of those apps are for delivered fuels. Folks are turning to Op Fuel after their CEAP benefits have exhausted , customers have high sense of urgency around that. Legislatures actions will help us help more people to stay open longer and accept more applications. We are going to look to partners and look at ways we can do that.</p> <p><b><u>Q&amp;A:</u></b></p> <p>Q:Chairwoman Coleman: For the 30% that aren’t oil delivered fuel customers, do you happen to know the breakdown between natural gas and electric heat customers?</p> <p>A: Gannon Long, as of last week we had about 73% for oil assistance and 18% for electricity, gas was a small percentage.</p>

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	<p>Q: Chairwoman Coleman: is this trend consistent with prior years that would be heavy delivered fuels?</p> <p>A. Gannon Long: I think delivered fuels are always up there. Just my recollection of last winter season was that electricity was a higher percentage of winter season applications, because, hardship customers were put onto the Standard Service, which in some cases was like 24 cents so that those rate increases, for electricity will always hit people hard this year. I don't think the increase was that dramatic (this year), the assistance for delivered fuel was less so. Those 2 things, I think, last year was more electricity at this time of year. This year it's much more delivered fuel because people have already run out of their CEAP benefits.</p> <p><b><u>c. Eversource:</u></b> Joanne Whistnant: See report <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p><b><u>Q&amp;A:</u></b></p> <p>Q: Chairwoman Coleman: Is it correct New Start lowered arrearage balances of about \$2 million, with 8,000 more enrolled than last year?</p> <p>A: Joanne Whistnant: Yes, correct. We had about 37,000 people enrolled in Newstart as of December 30, in comparison to 2022 year of the 29,756.</p> <p>Q: Chairwoman Coleman - so the balance decreased per enrollee under the MPP, in comparison between 2022 to 2023.</p> <p>A: Joanne Whisnant: In 2022, it went down by about 1,040 for electric and for gas, the 1,976-year ending. It's a difference of about a thousand dollars for electric customers, and almost \$2,000.00 for gas.</p> <p>Q: Chair Coleman: Those seem like positive trends. Do you have any thoughts as to the driving factors for the MPP and New Start Program?</p> <p>A: Joane Whistnant: We do you have 8,000 more enrolled, which could have been contributed to the rate increase that we had in January of last year. We might have had more customers getting onto the New Start program to try to forgive...balance and then for the matching payment program with it being electric. Also, we've had heating customers that were heating with electric also the increase and the rates that could have contributed to the increase in program participation.</p> <p>Q: Chairwoman Coleman: The rising electric costs are not the positive. I was thinking the increased participation in New Start and the MPP helps lower, the overall arrearages.</p> <p>A: Joane Whistnant- Yes, the MPP does do that, it's a very affordable program for participants to get into with gas or electric. The New Start, also, because of the rate increase, it did put more people onto the program to try to forgive that arrearage balance.</p>

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	<p><b>d. Avangrid:</b> Jaime Soto, see report <a href="#">here</a>. There is an increase participation for MPP, all of the agencies were given a list of customers who had not received a CEAP commitment, the agencies can do outreach to the customers, demographics were shared so the CAA’s an complete call campaigns and emails. We are continuously trying to reach the customers to be eligible for all program benefits, for the matching that would happen in May 2024.</p> <p><b><u>Q&amp;A:</u></b></p> <p>Q: Matthew Dillon, CT Legal Aid: There was rollout of the low-income discount rate, any data yet on what enrollment looks like so far?</p> <p>Response: Chairwoman Coleman: Will direct the question to the utility reps. I was hoping to have a more in-depth presentation, but we weren’t able to do it today, hopefully at one of our next meetings.</p> <p>A: Jaime Soto: a little over 32,000.00customers enrolled and majority of them are on tier 2 – can send info after meeting</p> <p>A: Eversource: can provide supplemental report after the meeting</p> <p>Q: Chairwoman Coleman: If it is possible to include those numbers on a regular basis (monthly) .. it would be great.</p> <p>A: Eversource and Avangrid replied affirmatively.</p>
<p>5. Agency Updates on Docketed &amp;/or Legislative Matters</p>	<p><b>a. PURA-Frank Augeri:</b> In the water rate case evidentiary hearing has wrapped up, briefs due in March, final decision in June. Gas &amp; SNG, evidentiary hearings are in late April and final decision in October. Affordability docket 24-05-01 is docket that will review maximum payment RAM as well as MPP, New Start and Bill Forgiveness programs.</p> <p><b><u>b. LIEAB Statute</u></b></p> <p>Richard Hanratty-(I’d like)ask for support for bill that the Energy and Technology Committee will raise this session to add language to update authorizing statue incase Low income water assistance program is re-established on the Federal Level. The Federal bill to permanently establish LIWAP could possibly have funding in future and this language prepares for that.</p> <p><b><u>Comment:</u></b></p> <p>Chairwoman Coleman: Yes, I did in intend to update the board, that the language that was circulated earlier was provided to the Energy and Technology leadership, we are hopeful to see that turned into Bill language and to have many of you from the board at the hearing. We will keep you appraised of any hearing dates to come. The legal services organization changes that Matt Dillon, raised at the last meeting were also included.</p>

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	<p><u>Comment &amp; Question:</u> Gannon Long: I want to note an update in the first paragraph, Operation Fuel as a Chief Executive Officer instead of an Executive Director. – Section E, which is now Section F, there is language that is omitted.</p> <p>A: Chairwoman Coleman: The goal of the reporting changes was just to broaden out the requirement. The prior statute reflected a one-time Report issued in 2016, that had all of those specific requirements in it. The intent is not to say we won't discuss those in our, bi-annual report, but we do have flexibility to address those as well as other issues as long as they're related to recommendations to improve availability, administration and implementation of heating and water assistance programs. We can certainly seek to get the amended leadership's name. If you wouldn't mind just following up with an email, we can work with the leadership to make sure that's reflected accurately.</p> <p><u>Comment:</u> Vice Chairwoman, Nora Duncan, I just wanted to point out that the bill, with the additional funding for CEAP and Op. Fuel is already in the House being discussed. Great work, everybody.</p> <p>Chairwoman Coleman: Yes, thank you including Nora, who did a lot of a lot of advocacy. So, thank you for your work to get that moving forward. It was amazing timing today that we set this date, you know, 2 months ago to come here, and here we are in the middle of vote, voting for supplemental funding for heating assistance. So, it's a great day.</p>
6. Public Comments	<p><u>Comment:</u> Chris Herb noted a question in the chat:</p> <p><b><u>Q&amp;A:</u></b>  Q: Thomas McBurney: If the budget is approved, how long would it take to go into effect? I've needed heat assistance for the last 3 years and this is the first time I've ever not been able to get oil from New Opportunities and my family is out of oil. I'm sure I am not the only household that is in this situation.</p> <p>A: Chairwoman Coleman: I believe that Bill language says effective upon passage. Deputy Commissioner Peter Handler might have a sense of timing on how long it's going to take to roll out these additional funds.</p> <p>A: Peter Hadler, DSS, Yes, it is effective from passage. We expect to begin operationalizing this process as quickly as we can in partnership with our community action agencies who will be helping us to deliver those benefits...as fast as we can.</p> <p>A: Gannon Long, Op. Fuel There's a process as far as contracting and how the State works with that. We will work with DSS as much as we can to get that out as quickly as possible. We'll also review internally our processes and guidelines and see if there's anything we can relax to make it easier for fuel banks and for online applicants to get the funds out more quickly. It is</p>

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	<p>possible to apply today for Operation Fuel, it is still open. If folks want to apply directly. You don't have to have anything else before you apply for help with us. You don't have to receive other benefits, but if you go to OperationFuel.org, (you)can get help, you'll see the information that you need, and if you do need help with submitting an application you can connect with one of our 45 fuel banks around the State. They're also available at that website.</p> <p><u>Comment:</u> Rhonda Evans-I would like to reiterate that once all of the votes have been made and approved. I want to point out the fact that we will need to do that in partnership with DSS as they will be giving the Community Action Agencies the criteria, and terms of how those funds are to be allocated.</p> <p>Chairwoman Coleman: That's a really important point, and my co-chair, Nora here has just pointed out the bill has passed in the House as well. So that's great news. I do want to acknowledge all of the work that the CAA's do and Operation fuel and that DSS does to help get this money out the door. And we're grateful to you and your staff for all your hard work.</p> <p><b><u>Q&amp;A:</u></b></p> <p>Q: Jaime Soto, UI- Do we know when the State will start releasing funds for CEAP payments for approvals for this season?</p> <p>A: Peter Hadler, DSS we need to finalize an agreement between us and utility companies, and then we would be able to make those basic benefit payments for utility households in the very, very near future.</p> <p>Comment: Jaime Soto, UI- Thank you. I also have the LIDR, we have 44,162 customers on LIDR, 22521 on Tier 2, which is 50% and the balance is on Tier 1 which is the 10%. Currently we have 6,095 pending that have declared hardship and waiting for them to submit their document or get approved through DSS matching to get approved.</p> <p>Chairwoman Coleman: any other questions or comments before we adjourn? Seeing none, I'd ask for a motion to adjourn the meeting.</p> <p>Motion by Gannon Long and second by Jaime Soto.</p> <p>No objections or abstentions, the motion passes.</p>
7. Adjournment	Meeting was adjourned at 2:24PM

Next meeting: Wednesday, April 3, 2024