

Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) Public Hearing 1 Transcript

Date: Monday April 29, 2024. 10:00AM – 11:00AM.

Attendees: Brian Biernat, Steve Bigler, Olivia Colon, Lilly Hoch, Lorenzo Macaluso, Julie Saimininkas, Becca Trietch, Rodbel Virula, Greg (last name not displayed on Teams)

0:1:45.120 --> 0:1:45.890

Trietch, Becca

Hi everybody.

0:1:45.900 --> 0:1:49.560

Trietch, Becca

Thank you so much for joining our public hearing today.

0:1:49.940 --> 0:1:57.390

Trietch, Becca

We're here to talk about Program Year 2024, the one-to-four unit Weatherization Assistance Program or WAP program.

0:1:57.620 --> 0:1:58.420

Trietch, Becca

My name is Becca Trietch.

0:1:58.430 --> 0:2:7.350

Trietch, Becca

I'm a senior policy advisor at Connecticut DEEP and I'll be leading us through an initial presentation here before opening things up to public comment.

0:2:8.880 --> 0:2:9.260

Trietch, Becca

Right.

0:2:10.80 --> 0:2:13.820

Trietch, Becca

So first off, what is the purpose of the Weatherization Assistance Program?

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Trietch, Becca

Specifically, our one-to-four unit program that we're talking about today, it's to increase the energy efficiency of dwellings owned or occupied by income-eligible persons and to improve their health and safety, especially for individuals and households identified as vulnerable.

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Trietch, Becca

This program is administered following federal regulations.

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Trietch, Becca

The funding for this program does come from the Federal Department of Energy, and today we're here to talk about a draft plan for the federal Formula Funds.

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Trietch, Becca

Again, this is our one-to-four unit Weatherization Assistance Program.

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Trietch, Becca

We do have separate Weatherization Assistance Program funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, or BIL funding, and that funding has already been allocated to a multifamily, so a 5+ unit, WAP program that's separate from what we're talking about today.

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Trietch, Becca

Today, we're really focused on the formula funds that come annually again, that are focused on one-to-four unit buildings.

0:3:12.110 --> 0:3:12.710

Trietch, Becca

All right.

0:3:12.720 --> 0:3:26.10

Trietch, Becca

So if anybody has taken a look at our State Plan that we've posted on our web page, you'll see that our budget in total for formula funds is a little over \$4 million.

0:3:26.510 --> 0:3:39.890

Trietch, Becca

That said a portion of that is proposed to be allocated to the Grantee, or DEEP, about \$604,000 to DEEP, and that would include a little bit of admin.

0:3:40.60 --> 0:3:47.120

Trietch, Becca

But then the majority of those funds really goes to training and technical assistance, which includes our field and desk monitoring activities.

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Trietch, Becca

So all of our quality control inspection activities in addition to that. The majority of funds are allocated to the Subgrantees that administer this program.

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Trietch, Becca

As you can see on the slide, a little over \$3,000,000 is allocated to the Subgrantees.

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Trietch, Becca

There are two Subgrantees for this program and the majority, of course, is allocated to program operations, which is the delivery of the weatherization

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Trietch, Becca

measures themselves.

0:4:22.90 --> 0:4:22.700

Trietch, Becca

Next slide.

0:4:22.710 --> 0:4:23.70

Trietch, Becca

There we go.

0:4:25.110 --> 0:4:33.590

Trietch, Becca

Also important to note that for Program Year 2024, we're proposing to keep the same WAP regions that we used in the previous year.

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Trietch, Becca

That means that you know, probably landmass wise about 3/4 of the state would be allocated to CRT and sort of the bottom left of the state would be allocated to CET.

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Trietch, Becca

We did develop these regions based on the number of individuals that qualify for low-income by meeting the 60% SMI standard for low-income. And these two regions have approximately the same population of households that meet that low-income standard.

0:5:14.390 --> 0:5:15.180

Trietch, Becca

All right.

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Trietch, Becca

Other important changes to note for Program Year 2024.

0:5:20.850 --> 0:5:37.220

Trietch, Becca

First off, we want to acknowledge that we did, last year, issue an RFP to competitively select service providers for Program Year 2024 or from Program Year 2023 through Program Year 2025.

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Trietch, Becca

So it's a three-year contract with service providers and so Program Year 2024, which is this plan that we're talking about today, would continue using these same service providers.

0:5:48.70 --> 0:5:53.730

Trietch, Becca

So that is the Center for EcoTechnology or CET and the Community Renewal Team or CRT.

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Trietch, Becca

Also important to note that we are expected to receive Weatherization Readiness Funding or WRF funding.

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Trietch, Becca

The current proposal does allocate the majority of WRF funding to the Residential Energy Preparation Services or REPS program to address health and safety barriers to weatherization.

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Trietch, Becca

The REPS program was developed by DEEP last year in 2023, again to address those barriers such as mold and asbestos and vermiculite, that prevent a home from being weatherized.

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Trietch, Becca

And so the majority of WRF funds currently in the plan are allocated to the REPS program and a smaller portion of the WRF funding is allocated to the subgrantees of the WAP program to address minor health and safety issues as well as whole home ventilation requirements.

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Trietch, Becca

That said, we are definitely seeking public input on this division of funding.

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Trietch, Becca

Other updates for Program Year2024: DEEP will be transitioning to DOE's.

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Trietch, Becca

WA web suite of software that includes NEAT and MHEA.

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Trietch, Becca

This software suite is cloud based, which is great.

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Trietch, Becca

It allows for more streamlined access while still being secure.

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Trietch, Becca

And of course, this transition is required by DOE, so we're actively working to try to get that set up for the beginning of Program Year 2024.

0:7:19.210 --> 0:7:27.140

Trietch, Becca

In addition to that, we were proposing to pursue the use of Hancock's energy audit tool called MINT.

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Trietch, Becca

This energy audit tool would connect directly with the WAP program's data management software, which is Hancock, which hopefully would help to streamline some of the data input processes.

0:7:42.20 --> 0:7:51.990

Trietch, Becca

In terms of production goals for Program Year 2024, we're proposing about the same units for each region, which would total to 241 units.

0:7:52.220 --> 0:7:59.730

Trietch, Becca

These production goals are based on average cost per unit values, which are dictated by the Federal Department of Energy.

0:8:2.830 --> 0:8:14.940

Trietch, Becca

Uh, we also use technical consultants each year to, you know, provide desk reviews as well as monitoring activities.

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Trietch, Becca

The quality control inspections

0:8:17.30 --> 0:8:20.910

Trietch, Becca for 2024, as well in this program year.

0:8:20.920 --> 0:8:33.620

Trietch, Becca

We are in contract negotiations with the Association for Energy Affordability, or AEA, for desk consultant services as well as contract negotiations with True View Consultants, or TVC, for field monitor services.

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Trietch, Becca

And again, we solicited these folks through a competitive RFP last year and we're in contract negotiations with them currently.

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Trietch, Becca

All right.

0:8:45.20 --> 0:8:57.510

Trietch, Becca

We did post a first draft of the 2024 WAP plan earlier and so we have received some public comments that we've responded to

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Trietch, Becca

to-date that we wanted to share them with you.

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Trietch, Becca

First off, we did receive some comments from the Center of EcoTechnology, or CET, which again is one of the Subgrantees for this program.

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Trietch, Becca

They commented on sort of four key areas.

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Trietch, Becca

One, they were encouraging DEEP to ensure that the plan would try to support continual service

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Trietch, Becca

you know, year to year as much as possible.

0:9:22.880 --> 0:9:24.80

Trietch, Becca

Two.

0:9:24.90 --> 0:9:33.600

Trietch, Becca

they provided feedback on whether or not the two years that are currently used for rent protections in the program was reasonable.

0:9:33.610 --> 0:9:36.590

Trietch, Becca

They indicated that they thought it was a reasonable time frame.

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Trietch, Becca

Three, they encouraged fuel switching within the program and supported access to heat pumps and heat pump hot water heaters through the program, as well as encouraged us to try to find ways to, you know, stack incentives with other federal funding such as the Inflation Reduction Act rebate programs.

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Trietch, Becca

In attempting to respond to these public comments, we have posted a matrix of responses on our website.

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Trietch, Becca

So if anybody wants to read all of the details here, you know there's a lot of text.

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Trietch, Becca

Please feel free to pull that up on our website, but high level in terms of responding to continual services,

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Trietch, Becca

DEEP has committed to, you know, three-year contracts with our service providers,

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Trietch, Becca

as I indicated earlier. And we're very hopeful that that will help to smooth out services for this program for several years in a row.

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Trietch, Becca

Umm, we also, by signing those three-year contracts with Subgrantees, we've also been able to include in our annual plan for Program Year 2024 the names of those Subgrantees from the get-go.

0:10:47.880 --> 0:10:54.530

Trietch, Becca

So that should help to avoid bureaucratic delays in getting approval from DOE for the selected Subgrantees.

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Trietch, Becca

For item number 2, around like the length of time for rent protections, DEEP is still seeking additional responses.

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Trietch, Becca

We appreciated CET's comments, but we are hopeful that we can get a perspective from landlords and or, you know, renters or folks that can represent renters just to have a better understanding of what that time frame should be for rent protections.

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Trietch, Becca

And then in terms of responses to CET, sort of topics 3 and 4, DEEP has in our second draft of the State Plan added commitments to exploring fuel switching and alternative energy efficiency measures in Program Year 24. The full text that was added is on this slide.

0:11:42.80 --> 0:11:47.290

Trietch, Becca

But again, please feel free to also look on our website for the full text if you want to read it.

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Trietch, Becca

All right.

0:11:50.210 --> 0:11:57.160

Trietch, Becca

We also received some public comments from Claire Coleman on the LIEAB or the Low-Income Energy Advisory Board.

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Trietch, Becca

In general, comments were provided during a live meeting where we presented our first draft of the plan and comments were primarily focused on trying to use other federal funding sources to address health and safety barriers.

0:12:13.780 --> 0:12:23.560

Trietch, Becca

Again, to support, you know, achieve those health and safety barrier removals through the Residential Energy Preparation Services program or REPS program.

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Trietch, Becca

Again, our response to this has been that at this point, the draft plan does allocate the majority of WRF funding to REPS, and we continue to look for other federal funding for health and safety remediation wherever we can.

0:12:40.560 --> 0:12:49.890

Trietch, Becca

That said, we are again still seeking public input as to whether or not the split proposed in the plan is the correct split for WRF funding.

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Trietch, Becca

And then again, we have split it between the REPS program and the WAP Subgrantees.

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Trietch, Becca

The last sort of chunk of public comments that were received to date were also provided orally during the LIEAB meeting, and these were provided by Chris Herb.

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Trietch, Becca

And he was primarily asking how fuel switching was related to energy efficiency and to, you know, ask for the connection between fuel switching and efficiency gains.

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Trietch, Becca

And so DEEP has added a paragraph into our draft State Plan, sort of explaining the connection between fuel switching and energy efficiency.

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Trietch, Becca

That paragraph has been placed here

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Trietch, Becca

if folks want to read it, but again, this matrix is also up on our website

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Trietch, Becca

if you want more time to take a look. Hopefully we've made it clear that in some cases fuel-switching is efficient.

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Trietch, Becca

That fuel switching really does provide not only increased energy efficiency, but can provide lower energy bills as well.

0:13:46.810 --> 0:13:57.410

Trietch, Becca

But we do want to recognize that because the difference in pricing between different fuel types, there could be instances where fuel switching could increase somebody's energy bills.

0:13:57.420 --> 0:14:18.830

Trietch, Becca

And so we would need to consider this very carefully if we implemented fuel switching

through this program and we'd have to develop some kind of rules or procedures that would allow us to ensure that a low-income customer would ultimately achieve, you know, lower energy bills, not higher energy bills through this process of fuel switching.

0:14:21.270 --> 0:14:21.600

Trietch, Becca

All right.

0:14:21.610 --> 0:14:23.500

Trietch, Becca

A couple of other changes made to the Program Year

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Trietch, Becca

24 WAP State Plan based on some of the public comments and also our initial review of our draft version.

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Trietch, Becca

First, on page 20, under the multifamily section, we simply removed the sentence discussing small multifamily service goals.

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Trietch, Becca

Specifically because large multifamily, as I noted before, is really being served through our multifamily WAP program which is funded through our BIL funding and then for our small multifamily goals of again, sort of in that one-to-four unit range,

0:15:0.320 --> 0:15:9.850

Trietch, Becca

we will work on directly with our Subgrantees each year to try to figure out how many will be possible to serve.

0:15:9.860 --> 0:15:30.240

Trietch, Becca

But we do have a goal to try to increase the service of the two-to-four family units through this one-to-four WAP program.

On page 26 under administrative allocation, we also added a statement just regarding the distribution of admin funding between the Subgrantee and Grantee in future program years.

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Trietch, Becca

Primarily, we just wanted to level set expectations.

0:15:33.810 --> 0:15:54.180

Trietch, Becca

This Program Year we are once more allocating a larger percentage of admin funding to the Subgrantees versus the Grantee, which is DEEP. We're able to do so because there are other federal funding streams available to support DEEP's admin expenditures here.

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Trietch, Becca

But in the future, that may not be available, and so we just wanted to level set expectations with Subgrantees in the long run.

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Trietch, Becca

Other changes on page 34 under the Training and Technical Assistance, or T&TA, activities, we added a statement regarding DEEP's current contract with Green Jobs Academy, which is an accredited training resource.

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Trietch, Becca

Again, this is just to make sure that Subgrantees and others are aware that we have an existing contract and so we can get training readily through an accredited entity as needed.

0:16:33.810 --> 0:16:48.230

Trietch, Becca

On pages 35 through 36 on fuel switching alternative technologies, I already noted this, but we did add a commitment regarding the exploration of fuel switching, heat pumps and other energy efficiency activities as ECM measures as well as solar PV.

0:16:51.150 --> 0:16:51.600

Trietch, Becca

All right.

0:16:52.450 --> 0:16:56.920

Trietch, Becca

So that sort of covers our overview of changes to date to the State Plan.

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Trietch, Becca

That said,

0:16:59.490 --> 0:17:4.560

Trietch, Becca

we have requested public comment on our second draft of the plan.

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Trietch, Becca

Comments are due by the end of the day today, so I hope folks have been able to take a look.

0:17:11.240 --> 0:17:16.690

Trietch, Becca

We will, after this, you know, open the floor up to public comment as well.

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Trietch, Becca

So, before we receive verbal comment, in our notice for public comments

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Trietch, Becca

I just wanted to flag for folks that we do have sort of three areas that we're really interested in receiving

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Trietch, Becca

public comment on. One is again the length of time for renter protections in this program. Two, we're looking for additional feedback on fuel switching and transitioning to new, more efficient technologies within the program.

0:17:41.410 --> 0:17:53.240

Trietch, Becca

And then three, as I mentioned before, we're definitely interested in any feedback on the allocation and subdivision of Weatherization Readiness Funding between the REPS program and the WAP Subgrantees.

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Trietch, Becca

If you are interested in submitting written comments, please do send them to deep.energybureau@ct.gov.

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Trietch, Becca

You can see the full notice for our written comment opportunity on our web page, which is ct.gov/deep/weatherization.

0:18:10.800 --> 0:18:11.100

Trietch, Becca

All right.

0:18:11.110 --> 0:18:17.610

Trietch, Becca

So just a little bit more detail on those three areas of public comment that we're particularly interested in receiving feedback on.

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Trietch, Becca

One about the rent protections.

0:18:22.10 --> 0:18:41.970

Trietch, Becca

So DOE does require that all Grantees ensure that the benefits of weatherization to occupants of rental units are protected according to a federal regulation which states that regardless of housing type, the grantees procedures for rental units shall at minimum ensure that written permission of the building owner or authorized agent is obtained before commencing work.

0:18:42.930 --> 0:19:2.280

Trietch, Becca

Benefits of the services accrued primarily flow to the low-income tenants residing in such units; for a reasonable period of time after completion, the household will not be subjected to rent increases unless those increases are demonstrably related to other matters other than the weatherization work being performed.

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Trietch, Becca

There are adequate procedures whereby the Grantee can receive tenant complaints and owners can appeal should rental increases occur and no undue or excessive enhancement shall occur to the value of the dwelling unit.

0:19:16.160 → 0:19:25.530

Trietch, Becca

So again, Connecticut DEEP is seeking input specifically on what constitutes a reasonable period of time for protection from rent increases due to weatherization.

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Trietch, Becca

Historically, WAP has used two years for this.

0:19:32.530 --> 0:19:46.500

Trietch, Becca

On the fuel switching topic, DOE does allow fuel switching as an energy conservation measure when it meets a savings-to-investment ratio of 1.0 or better. Fuel switching could also be implemented as a health and safety measure.

0:19:47.10 --> 0:20:14.240

Trietch, Becca

The process of allowing fuel switching in WAP would involve seeking approval from DOE by demonstrating competence at the Grantee and Subgrantee level, and that would include providing sample audits to DOE for review and updating libraries in the energy auditing software. Currently Connecticut WAP is proposing to work throughout Program Year 2024 to seek approval from DOE to administer fuel switching in the program.

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Trietch, Becca

But again, we are actively seeking public comment on this and I do want to acknowledge that we would want to ensure that such fuel switching would not negatively impact low-income energy bills.

0:20:28.790 --> 0:20:37.240

Trietch, Becca

Lastly, as I noted again, we're really interested in public comments on the division of Weatherization Readiness Funds or WRF funding.

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Trietch, Becca

The purpose of WRF is to allow WAP to address necessary repairs such as health and safety and structural issues in dwelling units that have been deferred from receiving weatherization services.

0:20:49.100 --> 0:20:55.970

Trietch, Becca

All units receiving WRF must result in a completed weatherized dwelling at the end.

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Trietch, Becca

So again, Connecticut DEEP is seeking input on how much of the Weatherization Readiness Funding should be allocated to our existing REPS program versus the WAP Subgrantees.

0:21:9.960 --> 0:21:12.490

Trietch, Becca

And with that, I just wanted to give a quick friendly reminder.

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Trietch, Becca

Today is obviously our public hearing.

0:21:15.120 --> 0:21:17.70

Trietch, Becca

This is hearing number one that folks have joined.

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Trietch, Becca

There is another hearing later today from 5:00 to 6:00 PM, both public hearings are hybrid.

0:21:23.420 --> 0:21:30.480

Trietch, Becca

So thanks to those folks that have joined, if you haven't seen our second draft of the plan, it is posted on our website.

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Trietch, Becca

Again,

0:21:31.30 --> 0:21:44.120

Trietch, Becca

That's ct.gov/deep/weatherization. Written comments on the second draft of the plan are due at the end of the day today, and you can send those written comments to deep.energybureau@ct.gov.

0:21:44.930 --> 0:22:5.500

Trietch, Becca

But with that, I would love to open things up to a public comment opportunity. During our hearing, I will ask, and it doesn't look like anybody has joined us in person, for folks on the,

you know, virtual Teams here - if you would like to provide a public comment, please do raise your hand and we'll call on you in the order that the hands come up.

0:22:5.640 --> 0:22:10.780

Trietch, Becca

And please do state your name and affiliation prior to giving your public comments.

0:22:11.350 --> 0:22:15.880

Trietch, Becca

With that, I will open it up to any public comments folks want to provide.

0:22:25.90 --> 0:22:33.440

Trietch, Becca

And I will say we're probably a small enough group that if folks have any trouble trying to raise your hand, feel free to just come off mute and state your name and affiliation.

0:23:3.30 --> 0:23:3.240

Trietch, Becca

Right.

0:23:3.250 --> 0:23:5.180

Trietch, Becca

I'm not seeing any hands.

0:23:6.410 --> 0:23:21.840

Trietch, Becca

I'm going to leave things open for, you know, probably 5 to 10 minutes to make sure that folks have the opportunity to provide comments, but please don't be shy if you have anything you want to say, please do come off mute.

0:23:22.0 --> 0:23:26.0

Trietch, Becca

And again, just state your name and affiliation before providing your public comment.

0:24:47.390 --> 0:24:47.680

Trietch, Becca

Right.

0:24:47.690 --> 0:24:56.300

Trietch, Becca

While we're waiting for folks to potentially have public comments, what I'm going to do is simply keep up on the screen,

0:24:56.310 --> 0:24:56.600

Trietch, Becca
sort of,

0:24:56.610 --> 0:25:3.320

Trietch, Becca
the three areas that DEEP is particularly interested in receiving public comments on just in case

0:25:3.330 --> 0:25:4.380

Trietch, Becca
that's helpful to folks.

0:25:4.990 --> 0:25:12.200

Trietch, Becca
But again, we are open to all public comments on any aspect of the plan so please feel free to share any thoughts.

0:27:34.760 --> 0:27:38.900

Trietch, Becca
Right, I am not seeing any raised hands.

0:27:42.340 --> 0:27:48.930

Trietch, Becca
If there are no public comments then I think will probably adjourn at 10:30.

0:27:48.980 --> 0:27:54.230

Trietch, Becca
We'll give it a couple more minutes to see if other folks are able to join.

0:29:23.530 --> 0:29:24.20

Trietch, Becca
Right.

0:29:24.90 --> 0:29:29.320

Trietch, Becca
I'm not hearing any public comments at this point or seeing any hands raised.

0:29:29.330 --> 0:29:40.60

Trietch, Becca
I think what we'll do is we will stay on the line just to make sure if folks trickle in later, that they could still provide their public comments.

0:29:40.940 --> 0:29:46.730

Trietch, Becca

But the transcript and recording of this, we will post publicly for folks.

0:29:47.370 --> 0:30:1.120

Trietch, Becca

Umm again friendly reminder that if you would like to submit any written comments, please do submit them by end of day today and those can be submitted to

deep.energybureau@ct.gov.

0:30:1.960 --> 0:30:14.730

Trietch, Becca

Umm, the other things I will throw up on the screen here are just again if you would like to join our other public hearing today, we are hosting it from 5:00 to 6:00 PM.

0:30:15.180 --> 0:30:20.590

Trietch, Becca

It's also a hybrid meeting, so if anybody wants to come in person, we're here at 10 Franklin Square, New Britain.

0:30:21.170 --> 0:30:24.590

Trietch, Becca

But otherwise, folks are able to join on Teams as well.

0:30:25.0 --> 0:30:31.310

Trietch, Becca

If you haven't seen the second draft of the plan yet, please do view it at

ct.gov/deep/weatherization.

0:30:31.320 --> 0:30:40.860

Trietch, Becca

We did attempt to highlight in bright yellow changes from the first draft, so hopefully those are easy to start to see.

0:30:43.90 --> 0:30:49.640

Trietch, Becca

And again, please do submit written comments by the end of the day today if you would like to submit them. And with that,

0:30:49.930 --> 0:30:52.60

Trietch, Becca

thank you all for joining folks.

0:30:52.830 --> 0:30:57.990

Trietch, Becca

Again, we'll stay online just in case folks are able to join between 10:30 and 11:00.

0:30:58.0 --> 0:31:0.240

Trietch, Becca

And if they are, we'll make sure that their public

0:31:0.250 --> 0:31:3.650

Trietch, Becca

comments are added to the transcript and the recording.

0:31:3.780 --> 0:31:15.520

Trietch, Becca

But since I don't see anybody raising their hand at this point, I think we can tentatively sort of adjourn unless other folks join that indicate that they would like to provide a public comment.

0:31:17.330 --> 0:31:17.660

Trietch, Becca

Right.

0:31:17.670 --> 0:31:18.330

Trietch, Becca

Thank you all.

0:59:6.510 --> 0:59:7.440

Trietch, Becca

Right.

0:59:7.610 --> 0:59:11.280

Trietch, Becca

I think we have stayed to almost 11:00 o'clock.

0:59:11.290 --> 0:59:20.900

Trietch, Becca

I'll wait one more minute, but we haven't had any other people join or raise their hand to give public comments, so I will officially adjourn this public hearing.

0:59:21.310 --> 0:59:22.350

Trietch, Becca

Thanks to everybody who joined.