

Transcript for WAP Public Hearing #2

April 29, 2024.

5:00PM – 6:00PM.

Attendees: Brian Biernat, Olivia Colon, Vanessa Ramos-Valle, and Becca Trietch

Brian Biernat

All right.

Good evening.

This is the Program Year 24 one-to-four unit Weatherization Assistance Program public hearing.

Looks like we're going to first go through the introduction. The purpose of WAP is to increase energy efficiency of dwelling units owned or occupied by income-eligible persons and to improve their health and safety, especially for individuals and households identified as vulnerable. In compliance with federal regulations, 10 CFR 440 and 2 CFR 200.

The draft plan we're discussing today is for federal funds only and the one-to-four unit weatherization program. Plans and budget for the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law WAP, the multifamily program can be viewed on DEEP's webpage.

The budget for the federal allocation for PY24 is \$2,996,244 for program, \$651,548 for technical and training assistance, \$380,474 for Weatherization Readiness Funds, totaling \$4,028,266. On this slide, we also have the Grantee distribution showing what DEEP admin is and DEEP T&TA is, and we also have the Subgrantee distribution showing their admin, program operations, health and safety, technical and training assistance, financial audits, insurance, Weatherization Readiness Funds and the total amount for the Subgrantees will be \$3,049,287.

For PY24, we have the Connecticut WAP regions map and on this slide we're showing how Litchfield, Hartford, Tolland, Windham, New London, and Middlesex counties are covered by CRT, also known as Region One. And then Region two will be covered by CET, which consists of New Haven and Fairfield counties.

The distribution of the counties between the regions is equally distributed based upon the number of low-income households throughout the state.

So 50% of the state households that meet 60% SMI are in one region and 50% in the other region.

Next slide here, we have the program changes for PY 2024. We have the new Subgrantees which

we competitively procured are both Center for Ecotechnology (CET) and Community Renewal Team (CRT). And the Subgrantees have contracts that extend through PY 2025.

CT DEEP will continue to give the majority of WRF funding to the Residential Energy Preparation Services program to address health and safety barriers to weatherization. The Subgrantees will also be given a smaller portion of WRF funds to address minor health and safety items and whole home ventilation requirements.

In PY24, we are also going to transition to DOE's weatherization assistant web suite of software, including NEAT and MHEA, which is the Mobile Home Energy Audit tool. This software suite is cloud based, allowing for more streamlined yet secure access, and the transition is required by DOE.

CT WAP will also pursue the use of Hancock's energy audit tool MINT and the MINT software. This energy audit tool connects with the program's data management software.

For production goals, we have region one with 121 units, region two with 120 units for a total of 241 units or households to be served by the program this year.

We have new technical consultants and monitors this year. The first contract that we're in negotiations with is AEA. They're going to be conducting the desk reviews, waiver reviews, and technical writing for CT DEEP. CT WAP is also in negotiations with TVC for field monitor services, and they'll be doing the in-progress monitoring, final inspections, and annual technical monitoring.

Public comments received to date with DEEP responses. The first comment that we've received so far is from Center for EcoTechnology (CET). And to summarize the comments, they asked us to look at making the service more continual between program years so that there's no stop and go, which can really affect production. For the next comment, they also said that two years seems reasonable for rent increased protections. For the third comment, they said fuel switching should be allowed and encouraged in our program. For their fourth comment, they said WAP should support access to heat pumps and heat pump hot water heaters.

And our responses would be to avoid bureaucratic delays that affect the continuity of the program between program years. Our next is to seek additional input into the whether or not we should be extending the two year rent increase protections beyond two years. And then to address comments three and four, we are looking at fuel switching and alternative energy efficiency measures in PY24 and are also looking for additional input into that from other stakeholders.

Public comments received to date with DEEP responses to date. During the Low-Income Energy

Advisory Board meeting, which is also our Public Advisory Committee, we had a comment from Claire Coleman in the Office of Consumer Council. General comments were provided about the use of various federal funding sources used to address health and safety barriers. And our response to that was while the majority of WRF funding is proposed to be allocated to REPS to address health and safety barriers in homes, DEEP is seeking input on whether CT WAP should allocate more WRF funding to WAP Subgrantees or less funding towards REPS in the Program Year 2024.

And then our next comment was from Chris Herb also on LIEAB and representing the Connecticut Energy Marketers Association. The general comments that we received were questioning whether energy efficiency is gained by fuel switching and requested clarification on how energy efficiency and fuel switching are related to each other. And the second draft of our plan, DEEP has added in the following language to better explain the connection between fuel switching and energy efficiency. I'm going to leave this slide up just for a little bit and we can go over that in the State Plan. But essentially what we have written is that moving to electric or energy efficient technologies can actually save more and can actually create more fuel savings and also in certain circumstances create energy savings on the actual bill for the customer.

And next slide, we have here is that other changes made to the PY 2024 plan include on page 20 under the multifamily section, we removed the sentence discussing the PY23 small multifamily service goal.

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

On page 34, under T&TA approach and activities we added a statement regarding DEEP currently holding a contract with Green Jobs Academy who will be our statewide training provider.

And on pages 35 through 36, we added a miscellaneous section of the State Plan regarding the Connecticut WAP's commitment to fuel switching, heat pumps, and solar PV or photovoltaics.

Opportunities for public input. DEEP has issued a request for written comments on the second draft of the PY24 1-4 unit WAP State Plan. Written comments on the second draft of the plan are due by April 29th, 2024, at 11:59 PM, which is tonight.

The three areas that we're looking for input. DEEP is seeking input on the length of time a renter is protected from rent increases due to weatherization. We're seeking input from the public regarding fuel switching and transitioning to newer, more efficient technologies. And we're also seeking public input on the allocation of WRF funding to REPS and WAP Subgrantees for addressing health and safety concerns.

We're hoping to have any written comments sent to deep.energybureau@ct.gov and we have the full notice available on www.ct.gov/deep/weatherization. Again, any public comments are to be received by 11:59 tonight.

On the next slide here, we have the Weatherization Program Notice 22-13 as it relates to rental units. DOE requires that all Grantees ensure that the benefits of weatherization go to occupants of rental units and are protected in accordance with 10 CFR 440.22 which states that regardless of housing type the Grantees procedures for rental units shall at the minimum include:

- Written permission of the building owner or authorized agent is obtained before commencing work.
- Benefits of the service accrue primarily 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.
- There are adequate procedures whereby the Grantee can receive tenant complaints and owners can appeal and should rental increases occur.
- And no undo or excessive enhancement shall occur to the value of the dwelling unit.

We are seeking input specifically on what constitutes a reasonable period of time for protection from rent increases due to weatherization. And historically WAP has used two years as a reasonable period of time for rent increase protection due to the weatherization of the unit.

Weatherization Program Notice 23-6 as it relates to fuel switching. DOE allows fuel switching as an energy conservation measure when meeting a savings-to-investment ratio of 1.0 or better. Fuel switching may also be completed as a health and safety measure. The process of allowing fuel switching in CT WAP involves seeking approval from DOE by demonstrating competence at the Grantee and Subgrantee level. And CT WAP is proposing to work throughout PY24 to seek approval from DOE to administer fuel switching in our program. DEEP is seeking input into how to best ensure fuel switching does not negatively impact low-income energy bills, including access to energy assistance.

Weatherization Program Notice 23-4 as it relates to WRF funding. Per HR2471, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022, we are allowed in WAP to create a set aside funding for a Weatherization Readiness Fund. The purpose of WRF is to allow WAP to address necessary repairs (health and safety, structural, etc.) in dwelling units that have been deferred from receiving weatherization services. Specifically, this funding is targeted to reduce the frequency of deferred homes that require services outside the scope of weatherization before the weatherization services can commence. All units receiving WRF must result in a DOE completion, defined as a dwelling unit in which a DOE approved energy audit or priority list has

been applied where weatherization work has been completed.

CT WAP is seeking input into how much WRF funding should be allocated to WAP Subgrantees and the Residential Energy Preparation Services program. REPS is tasked with addressing barriers to weatherization, while Subgrantees will be tasked with installing additional or minor health and safety measures where needed.

And today is the public hearing. We held hearing number one from 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM and hearing number two will be right now from 5:00 PM to 6:00 PM. Both are hybrid in DEEP public hearing room two and also on Teams.

The second draft of the plan is also posted on www.ct.gov/deep/weatherization. Written comments on the second draft of the plan are due by 11:59 PM tonight. Comments may be addressed to deep.energybureau@ct.gov.

And now we were going to give the public the ability to comment, and we ask that you please raise your hand, virtual or in person, and we'll call you in order of that. And please state your name and affiliation prior to giving your public comments.

So it doesn't look like I'm seeing or hearing any public comments right now. I will give it another 14 minutes or so until about 5:30 and if anybody wants to provide a comment at that time, they are more than welcome to and if not, again we will still receive written public comments until 11:59 tonight.

We will be posting this presentation as well as a transcript on our web page as well. The same www.ct.gov/deep/weatherization for anybody who may have missed the hearing or may not have seen the presentation either this morning or this evening.

Becca Trietch

And in case it is at all helpful, I will pull up our slide that has sort of the three key areas that we're seeking public input on. So again, just a friendly reminder, we're particularly interested in getting information about opinions or ideas about the length of time a renter should be protected from rent increases due to weatherization.

Also very interested in getting public input regarding fuel switching within the WAP program.

And very interested in hearing your thoughts and ideas around how the Weatherization Readiness Funding, or WRF funding, should be allocated between the Residential Energy Preparation Services, or REPS program, and the WAP Subgrantees.

That said, all comments are of course welcome. And again, please do simply raise your hand, or

even just come off mute, it looks like we're a pretty small crowd here. And just state your name and affiliation if you have any public comments to provide. And if no public comments now, again please note that written comments are due at midnight or one minute before midnight tonight, and those can be submitted to deep.energybureau@ct.gov.

Brian Biernat

Right, so it looks like we've reached the 5:30 mark. We'll go ahead and still be here until 6:00 o'clock in case anybody does want to come in. But for right now, I think we're going to just say thank you for joining the hearing and we look forward to getting any input that you do have. Thank you.

Alright it looks like it's 6:00 o'clock, so we will go ahead and adjourn this meeting. Thank you to everyone who joined. We look forward to receiving your comments and feedback.

Olivia Colon stopped transcription