



Illinois Department of Commerce

& Economic Opportunity

OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

Bruce Rauner, Governor

Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) Steering Committee Minutes of Meeting Held on January 11, 2018

Attendance in Springfield

Members: *Deirdre Coughlin, DCEO; Leslie DeVore, DCEO; Tammy Harter, DCEO; Janet Hawes-Davis, DCEO; Leslie Ann Lesko, DCEO; Ben Moore, DCEO; Kurt Verduin, DCEO; Kathy Walk, CEFS;*

Attendance in Chicago

Members: *Donna Cain, DCEO; Maria Gallardo, DCEO; Aimee English, Citizens Utility Board; Cassandra Vaughn, DCEO; Brigitte Hunter, DCEO; Kimberly Roberts, CEDA;*

Attendance via Telephone

Members: *Grace Brigando, ComEd; Melanie Brown, Ameren; Deborah Bursey, Ameren; Jennifer Fenske, Nicor Gas; Joan Howard, IL Commerce Commission; Karen Lussion, Attorney General's Office; Jim Monk, IL Energy Association; Lauren Pashayan, Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance; Ashley Miller, DuPage County Dept. of Community Services; Jennifer Schmidt, CEDA; Aarian Smith, ComEd; Martha Strawser, Rockford Human Services; Deb A. Hozzian, Peoples Gas.*

Call to Order

Leslie DeVore called the meeting to order.

Approval of Minutes

Jennifer Schmidt made a motion that the October 5th, 2017 minutes be accepted. She indicated the following statement was not made by her: "If you've already made your appointment please disregard this notice" as CEDA doesn't take appointments. The minutes will be revised Motion as amended was made by Jennifer Schmidt and seconded by Kathy Walk.

Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) Discussion Items

Maria Gallardo provided the Program Update. A total of \$25,044,461 is annually obligated on behalf of 26,211 customers enrolled in PIPP. There has been a total of 4,340 drops since July 1st, 2017. A total of 1,428 missed payments status statewide. New enrollments stopped on December 31st. Our office sent a procedure letter to LAAs to announce the end of enrollment date for new PIPP customers. All applicants will be offered a traditional DVP after December 31st. Agencies have until January 31st to process these applications in STARS. Agencies who took new applications still had funding available and their Admin capacity was allowing them to add more PIPP applications.

True-Up Adjustments

Starting October 1st, customers who are in good standing with their utilities and want to drop from PIPP during their recertification, could be eligible for a True-Up Adjustment benefit. The True-Up Adjustment looks at how much a customer has received in PIPP since the new Fiscal Year (July) and compares this amount against the DVP amount a customer is eligible for the program year. If the customer is owed a benefit, the LAA will drop that person in STARS and a pledge will be sent to the utility company/(IES). Some utilities indicated they are not seeing true-up adjustments and were wondering if there is a training issue. Maria contacted a couple of LAAs to know why we are not seeing that many True-Up Adjustments yet and the reason is that the majority of the recerts were done prior to Oct 1st (start date for the True-Up Adjustment benefits) and the recerts that are being done since then have either stayed on PIPP or they have already received more on PIPP than the DVP amount.

The Office of Community Assistance (OCA) is in the process of sending a True-Up Adjustment training manual to the LAAs and has also created a new report in STARS. We are in the process of testing this new report and anticipate sending the training document along with the new report built in STARS by the end of the week.

A clarification question about the True-Up adjustment process was requested. Maria clarified when a customer is eligible for a True-Up Adjustment benefit.

Development of Client Educational Material

As reported in previous meetings, OCA has developed a PIPP and Energy Savings brochures. We are currently waiting on the Spanish translation and finalizing for printing as well. We also plan to include a PDF version on our LIHEAP website.

PIPP Letters Review

Last meeting it was brought out that there were some identified issues with wording on the letters sent out to customers. Specifically, with the PIPP Recertification Letters (30 and 15 Day). Now to include "if you have already made your appointment/intake, please disregard this notice". Current language is confusing to customers who already have completed their recertification. Maria will be asking Kestner Consulting if STARS can prevent the second (15 day) letter from being sent to customers who have already been recertified.

The PIPP Recertification Drop Letters will be new letters created in STARS for each drop category- over income, missed payment, true-up adjustment, no true up adjustment, ineligible bill option.

The Changes in Benefit and the Drop Letters currently say that customer can apply for LIHEAP during appropriate priority period and it does not specify that they cannot apply until the next program year.

Maria is checking with Kestner to find out if the Approval Letters can be automated in STARS. Leslie Ann Lesko pointed out that the edits are coming from the committee bringing these issues to light. The Missed Payment Drop and Supplier Drop letters need to match the general drop letter that indicates the customer has 5 business days to appeal the future drop. At day 51 we can drop them from the program if no contest is received. However, the auto-drop in STARS was programmed to make the drop at day 60 to allow customers to become current by before they are dropped. In the meantime, the State is providing continued benefits because they are within the 45-day period. A report was pulled by OCA to view how many customers from July 1st to the present received a benefit after day 45 and the report

resulted that 166 applications are receiving benefits after 45 days, 80 after 60 days, and 53 applications are receiving in subsequent applications.

Jennifer Schmidt added that they are seeing customers who are missing two payments and pay them on day 57 or 58 and in the meantime the next bill comes in. If the next bill is not addressed (due very soon) when we work on getting the two missed payments caught up the customer is still in danger of dropping because of the third bill being late. It also gives the customer very little time to come up with money for their new bill that is due now. As a result, the LAA's suggest we go back dropping sooner than day 60 to avoid these cases. Martha Strawser suggested they have the ability of manually reset the clock in these situations so that it does not continue counting days from missed payments that have been paid and/or override the drop. Lauren Pashayan said that the discussion should also consider what the Energy Assistance can allow. She said that she doesn't believe the Energy Assistance Act doesn't allow for subsequent or add-on subsequent defaults. This means that if a customer pays their first missed payment, it could be argued that this should stop the clock.

Karen Lusson with the Attorney General's Office wanted to know how successful are the LAAs are with the utilities in trying to get PIPP customers squared away in relation to their missed payments before the customer loses their benefit. Jen Schmidt said the LAAs follow program rules and the STARS system is the one who drops a customer and not the utility. The utilities will indicate whether a customer has not made payments and by day 60 the STARS system will drop the customer for non-payment, according to program policy. There is a way to manually override the auto drop when there are hardship circumstances. Karen asked how much is the percentage of customers who are in this situation. Jen said that CEDA has currently 10,397 PIPP customers enrolled in the program, 569 accounts dropped (some represent multiple accounts from the same customer). They represent a low percentage but are taken seriously.

Martha Strawser indicated there are issues with utilities adding charges and fees after enrollment or reversals like bounced check fees and customers must pay these charges in addition to their PIPP payment. Customer service agents at ComEd do not deal well with these issues but once it comes to Martha's attention by her customers, she works with ComEd-PIPP staff to correct the issue. Aarian Smith explained that customer service agents would not know a lot of the back-office options. Kathy Walk from CEFS said that they are seeing customers receiving charges from an old account. The utility puts them on a payment plan for the balance on the old account but the customer has now their PIPP payment in addition to a payment arrangement thus putting the customer in a situation where they cannot afford the two payments.

There was a discussion about how the Pre Program Arrearage (PPA) is being handled by the utilities. Karen asked why couldn't the restore fee/reconnection fee be applied to the ARP. Jen Fenske says it's not a utility or usage charge. If a customer is disconnected they would not qualify for PIPP, they would qualify for LIHEAP-DVP. Melanie from Ameren said that this has been a rule of the program since its inception, perhaps it can be revisited. Another issue customers have are those who were supporting more than one household whose account has closed and moved onto their balance, would transferring this balance to the customer's PPA be an option. Jen from CEDA said she considers when the debt was accrued on the customer's account. If the debt was accrued before the customer's enrollment in PIPP, she would argue for this debt to be put on the customer's PPA. Martha Strawser agreed given PIPP is a low-income program and doing so will help the customer reduce their balance and become more successful in paying their utility bills.

Non-Services Related Charges (NSR)

Aimee English asked what is the definition of Non-Services Related (NSR) charges in the PIPP Program Manual. Maria believes it is more related to charges such as when a customer finances their furnace through the utility and the charge is put on the side as NSR charges and not covered by the PIPP benefit. Leslie DeVore said OCA will get back to the group with what is the NSR definition included in the PIPP Program Manual. A follow-up email was sent to the PIPP Steering Committee confirming the NSR definition included in the PIPP Manual. Maria indicated that the NSR charges are not currently included in the Definitions Section of the Manual. She said, though, that the manual says that a client's outstanding balance less any identifiable Non-Service Related (NSR) charges including On-Bill Financing becomes the client's pre-program arrearage that can be addressed in the PIPP because of client payment by the bill due date. Also, the Benefit Comparison screen will also show, in a separate field, any Non-Service Related (NSR) charges the client may have associated with his/her account. These NSR charges cannot be addressed by any state benefit and as such are the responsibility of the client. The NSR charges are added to the CPR and are due and payable in full by the client's bill due date. This will aid the intake worker to clearly explain the client responsibility. More discussion to follow on the next PIPP Steering Committee meeting.

Karen said that reconnection fees should be included with the utility charge and therefore, covered by PIPP. Aimee English agrees with Karen and indicated that reconnection should be defined as a service related utility charge and possibly change the PIPP policy.

Karen Lusson asked Nicor if they can provide data on how many of our PIPP customers with 3rd party warranties have warranty products in their utility bills. Bringing up that customers only know the breakdown of these warranty charges if they request it and are current on their bill. Jen Schmidt said that the case management portion of PIPP is a very important part of this program and these types of scenarios should be included as part of the customer education.

Karen Lusson requested the utilities to provide information about the percentage of their PIPP customers who are enrolled with an alternative supplier. Neither Nicor or ComEd allow alternative retailer suppliers. Ameren does however due to the purchase of receivables arrangement with some suppliers thus making them eligible for PIPP. Lauren also asked the same request for information for the LIHEAP population. Martha suggested we develop a letter for PIPP customers who are enrolled with an alternative supplier and encourage them to look at their provider more closely. Given that these customers are already enrolled, the letter will serve more as a follow-up to make sure they fully understand they may be paying more.

Meeting Schedule

The next quarterly meeting of the PIPP Steering Committee will be held on April 5th, 2018.

Adjournment

A motion was made to adjourn. Motion was seconded and carried.