



Illinois Department of Commerce

& Economic Opportunity

OFFICE OF ENERGY ASSISTANCE

Bruce Rauner, Governor

Low Income Energy Assistance Policy Advisory Council (PAC) Meeting Thursday, January 18, 2018 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Attendance

PAC Members: Leslie DeVore, DCEO; Ellen Rendos, Nicor Gas; Wanda Hopkins, South Austin Coalition; Melanie Brown (Proxy), Ameren; Joan Howard, Illinois Commerce Commission.

Guests: Shahi Nawab, CEDA; Jennifer Schmidt, CEDA; Mindy Browning, ERBA; Kathy Walk, CEFS; Brian Maruyama (Proxy), Nicor Gas.

Staff: Donna Cain, DCEO; Maria Gallardo, DCEO; Deirdre Coughlin, DCEO; Tammy Harter, DCEO; Mick Prince, DCEO; Ben Moore, DCEO; Wayne Hartel, DCEO; Leslie Ann Lesko, DCEO; Evans Spencer, DCEO; Kurt Verduin, DCEO

Attendance via Conference Telephone:

PAC Members: Michelle Machay (Proxy), Peoples Gas/North Shore Gas; Deb Hozzian, Peoples Gas/North Shore Gas; Lorrie Walls (Proxy), Chicago Department of Family and Support Services; Aimee English, Citizens Utility Board, Christine Brinkham, Commonwealth Edison; Barbara Eskildsen, Illinois Area Agency on Aging; Dalitso Sulamoyo, Champaign County Regional Planning Committee; Staci Wilson, Illinois Municipal Electric Agency

Guests: Latoya Butler, CEDA; Martha Strawser, Rockford Human Services; Aarian Smith, ComEd; Julie Vahling, AARP; John Pady, CEDA; Emily Williams, Nicor Gas.

Call to Order

Leslie DeVore called the meeting to order

Approval of Minutes

Leslie DeVore made a motion that the October 19, 2017 minutes be approved. No corrections presented. Motion approved by Brian Maruyama. Motion was seconded by Wanda Hopkins.

Discussion Items

Fiscal Report-

Ben Moore provided the Program Status Report with the Fiscal Overview. He reported that the issuance of grants has not gone as quickly as we would like due to new Grant Accountability and Transparency Act (GATA) requirements. New GATA requirements have hindered our ability to get grants out as quickly as we would like. He provided an update of where the process is.

The Federal Weatherization grants with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) funding have all been executed. There are 22 grants with the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) funding executed and 7 are in process. This means we received all the information we need from the grantees and they are in the final stages of being processed. There are five that we are working with to get resolved mostly with budget.

We have 12 State Weatherization grants executed and, 18 are in process and being finalized. There are 4 grantees who we are resolving issues with.

Ben provided a status of expenditures. A total of \$27 million was available for Weatherization and \$4 million has been spent to date. There is still \$23 million left. Some grantees have not reported all their costs because some homes require all 3 grants due to braided funding.

The State LIHEAP grants are now executed except for 5. One of those is in process, we are resolving 3 of them and some of the grants have issues with applications or budget submissions.

Federal HHS LIHEAP grants are completed but they are not executed yet. We will probably get a final count but several of them are back with waiting to be processed but we are still reviewing a good portion with HHS LIHEAP.

Ben provided a status of the LIHEAP expenditures. He said that a total of \$181 million is available in Program Year 2018. This includes HHS and State funding. There has been about \$98 million spent and about \$82 million left to last us through the end of the program year. There seems to be sufficient money to serve all the clients.

Melanie Brown inquired about the State LIHEAP PIPP Pledges that were still outstanding from July 2017. Ben Moore said they will be executed in the next week and half. As for the ones in process, they should be able to catch up within the next 3 weeks.

Aarian Smith asked when ComEd will start receiving payments. Ben Moore responded that for ComEd most of pledges should be paid in about 3 weeks.

Leslie DeVore said GATA changed the budget templates drastically for the LAAs when applying for grants. Previously, LAAs had to identify Admin, Program Support and Client Benefits. Currently, GATA requires sub-grantees to breakdown more costs within these budget categories and include their methodology. As a result, the process takes longer and it is more complex and therefore, the entire review and approval takes longer.

Leslie said that this year, OCA will provide an extensive training during the following month about the Grant Application Process. Ben Moore says our anticipation is that next year's application process will go better. There was a learning curve that all parts went through and this year should go better.

Leslie indicated that OCA doesn't find out what are the new GATA changes for the new Fiscal Year until July 1st, which is the date our grants should be executed.

Weatherization Report-

Mick Prince provided the Weatherization report and he said there are 382 units completed to date with 715 units in progress that are in the contractor's hands. We have moved to a braided funding approach and we need multiple funding sources to close the jobs out in WeatherWorks for some of these homes. Mick believes there are more homes completed than the 382, some of the Local Administering Agencies (LAAs) are waiting on the execution of grants to be able to close some of these homes out.

Mick provided an update of the WeatherWorks system replacement project. He said we have completed the information gathering for Phase I of the WeatherWorks system. There was a pre-intake piece where applicants can go online and start the intake process. We also did the information gathering for the intake piece and as discussed previously, the goal is for the new system to house the three programs (Weatherization, LIHEAP/PIPP and CSBG). This piece of the new system is still being developed. We are updating the field standards manual as well as the health and safety measures for PY19.

We met with all the utilities about a potential partnership moving forward with the EEPS funded weatherization. We are still working through the details. We finished the EEPS funded utility work on Dec 31st, 2017. The Department invoiced the utilities for a total of \$3 million in energy efficiency measures from June- December 31st, 2017.

Melanie Brown inquired about when the Department is planning to bring the communicating utilities in for testing the new system. Leslie DeVore indicated this phase only includes the Weatherization portion of the new system. The goal is to launch the Weatherization piece of the new system in October. The end goal is to have all the three programs into one system platform. Weatherization is the most complex as it includes energy calculations. There will be an online application on a mobile application where applicants can know whether they may be eligible for the program. However, the applicant will have to go to an intake site to formally apply for services. The overall goal is to reduce the amount of time applicants spend in an intake site and make it easier to applicants. Another feature of the new system is to be on a cloud and go paperless.

LIHEAP Report-

Maria Gallardo provided the LIHEAP/PIPP status report. She said the heating season started Oct 1st, 2017 and all the priority groups have applied. The general low-income population also started applying in December 1st and as a result a total of \$57,301,263 has been spent on behalf of 133,892 customer receiving LIHEAP benefits. See the Program Status Summary to find the breakdown by LAA.

PIPP Report- Maria Gallardo provided a program status and indicated that a total of \$25,019 is obligated annually on behalf of 26,183 households enrolled in PIPP.

Maria brought up for discussion the Low-Income designation included in Part 280 for PIPP customers who dropped after October 1st. There was a PIPP customer who dropped after October 1st due to missed payments and tried to apply for LIHEAP later on. Current program policy is that those dropping from PIPP after October 1st have been served for the remaining of the program year and they cannot apply for regular LIHEAP until the next enrollment period. Since his LIHEAP qualification was established before September 1st his low-income designation with the utility is effective until December 31st of the same year. We are currently communicating the LIHEAP denial reasons with the utilities via a daily batch process.

Maria is bringing this case to PAC discussion to decide whether this denial reason could be added so these customers so they can get protected under the Part 280 Low Income designation.

Aarian Smith would like to know how many customers fall into this situation. Leslie Devore said it is a low number.

A specific denial reason would be more helpful, especially narrowed down to PIPP customers.

Leslie Ann Lesko said she remembered last summer that agencies could show proof of low income designation but the utility would be able to manually do that. The STARS system does not communicate these drop reasons to the utilities and the utilities would not know if the person was low income. It would be good if there is some other method of trying to communicate besides via LIHEAP.net.

Leslie Ann asked if there is a way the utilities could accept verbal notice from the LAAs and do a manual designation so that these customers can receive their low-income designation with their utilities or whether we should include this category on the denial reasons.

Maria says manual emails sounds like too much work when we already have a working automated process. In addition to this group of customers, Martha Strawser said there is a time frame that is not currently included in the Part 280 Low-Income designation. These are customers coming to an LAA after the LIHEAP winter season ends May 31st and by before the program starts in October 1st.

Kathy Walk said that she does not feel comfortable saying a customer is low income eligible if she is not accepting their applications after the LIHEAP winter season ends.

There was a discussion about customers who are receiving benefits from other programs administered by agencies such as CSBG that could also be identified and protected through the Part 280 rules. CSBG serve households that are within the 125% of the federal poverty level, LIHEAP is 150% of poverty level, and WX is 200%.

Maria Gallardo suggested adding this reason (customers who come between June and October) into the daily batch process with the utilities but we need to find a way to identify these customers as no LIHEAP applications are taken during this period.

Leslie DeVore said OCA more discussions will be needed with the utilities to try to find a solution.

Wanda Hopkins said there needs to be something in place that can explain why a customer would not be able to get both LIHEAP and PIPP. She said it is confusing to PIPP customer to understand their budget bills. At the same time, PIPP letters show an amount to be paid but the bill from the utilities shows a different amount and it can be a cause for miss payment.

Maria said that LAAs must reiterate to PIPP customers they must see the amount due shown on the utility bill as the PIPP letters could have delayed information given it contains the amount provided by the utility at a specific date. In other words, the utility will always have the most current information as far as how much a customer must pay.

Wanda Hopkins suggested adding new verbiage to the PIPP letters to encourage customers to always review their budget bill due amount. Maria Gallardo said we can make changes to our PIPP letters at any time. In fact, she is meeting with a small group of LAAs to revise the PIPP letters and we will keep this in mind during the review process.

The PIPP enrollment ended December 31st and we provided the agencies until January 31st to enter and process all the PIPP applications.

We had a PIPP Steering Committee meeting on January 11th, and we talked about the new PIPP true up adjustments that is available in STARS. It is available to customers who are in good standing with their utilities and decide to drop because they don't want PIPP anymore. Basically, the true up adjustment will look into how much that customer has received in PIPP benefits to date and compare that against their DVP benefit amount. If the customer has not reached that DVP benefit amount then we will issue a true up adjustment benefit. On the other hand, if a customer has received more in PIPP benefits to date compared to their DVP amount the customer will not receive any further benefits during the remaining of the program year. Maria said we have not seen many true up adjustments to date mostly because customers have received more in PIPP benefits or they are not eligible for this benefit. She said we are finalizing the review of the training documents that will be sent to local agencies as soon as possible.

Aimee English asked if we could include the True Up Adjustment benefit in the fiscal report. It is a sort of third kind of expenditure.

Ben said we currently do not have a solid report but we will try to include that in our reports.

Aimee also asked where does the true-up adjustments benefit come from in the budget. Ben said it comes from the PIPP allocation.

Maria reported that new PIPP brochures have been developed with the help of the PIPP Steering Committee group. This is part of our client education effort. An energy savings brochure was also developed. She thanked everyone who contributed. The brochures are available in the LIHEAP website and OCA has printed them as well. We will also give the brochures to the LAAs.

Maria said she will be getting together with a small group of LAAs to look at our PIPP letters with the goal of making them more customer friendly. Some PIPP letters are currently too wordy and/or confusing.

New Business

Leslie Ann Lesko indicated that a Grant Application Workshop is scheduled February 7th with our LAAs. This workshop has been scheduled earlier this year so there are less delays with grants. There are program changes and guidelines, and extensive work on budget is required so this workshop is for those guidelines.

Other Business

OCA is in process of working with PAC members in updating their Designees letters.

Meeting Schedule

The next meeting of the PAC will be held on April 19, 2018.

Adjournment.

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