



**Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity**
JB Pritzker, Governor

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

Attendance:

PAC Members: Leslie DeVore, DCEO; Melanie Brown (Proxy), Ameren; Joan Howard, Illinois Commerce Commission; Kevin Wright, Illinois Competitive Energy Association (ICEA); David Baron, Peoples Gas/North Shore Gas

Guests: Mindy Browning, ERBA; Kim Campbell, Dynegy; Jennifer Schmidt, CEDA; Tyrone Pickens, CEDA; Shahi Nawab, CEDA; Kathy Walk, CEFS.

Staff: Angela Baldwin; Deirdre Coughlin; Maria Gallardo; Leslie Ann Lesko; Ben Moore; Marie Mueller; Mick Prince, DCEO.

Attendance via Conference Telephone:

PAC Members: Elizabeth Berendsen, City of Chicago; Christine Brinkham, Commonwealth Edison; Deborah Bursey, Ameren Illinois; Aimee English, Citizens Utility Board; Barbara Eskildsen, IL Area Agency on Aging; Wanda Hopkins, South Austin Coalition; Ellen Rendos, Nicor Gas; Lorrie Walls, City of Chicago.

Guests: Grace Brigando, ComEd; Latoya Butler, CEDA; Jack Erffmeyer, Attorney General's Office; Jennifer Fenske, Nicor Gas; Jennifer Jaeger, Rockford; Michelle Machay, Peoples Gas/North Shore Gas; Lauren Pashayan, Land of Lincoln Legal Foundation; Barbara Richardson, Legal Assistance Foundation of Metro Chicago; Martha Strawser, Rockford; Aarian Smith, ComEd, Anthony White, Ameren

Call to Order

Leslie DeVore called the meeting to order

Approval of Minutes

One correction was noted. Elizabeth Berendsen indicated she joined the July 19, 2018 meeting via the bridge. Kevin Wright made a motion to approve the minutes as amended and seconded by Joan Howard. Motion was approved.

Fiscal Report

Weatherization: Ben Moore reported the Weatherization program was extended with the HHS and State grants for FY18, through the end of September. It was to make sure they had start-up funds because of delays from the past few years with issues getting grants out prior to the beginning of the fiscal year. He also stated that it will be done this way moving forward. During PY18, the Weatherization program has released a total of \$38.7 million in grants to the local agencies so far and expended about \$7 million and leaving \$31.6 million remaining. Some grantees are still closing out grants, maybe causing more funds to be expended.

LIHEAP: There was a change to the grant processing this year. Although the State LIHEAP grant has been obligated, OCA is not making the funds available on LIHEAP.net until all the carry-over HHS money from the 2018 fund is expended by grantee. This was done because last year, OCA-Fiscal had to de-obligate several grantees to move some of the expiring money to other agencies. Ben said it was partially because if the State money is allocated on LIHEAP.net, any eligible customers would get charged to that grant first which left some un-obligated HHS money. If that money isn't spent during the grant period, it would have to be sent back to HHS. He said they wanted to take every opportunity to utilize that grant funding in Illinois. In October, the funds will not be put on LIHEAP.net until all the HHS money from 2018 is fully expended.

A total of \$214.6 million is available for this program year. A total of \$37.6 million has been expended and \$177 million is still available. Ben said changes were made by increasing the benefits. We are also making efforts for additional outreach. Fiscal does not currently have the 2019 allocation but anticipates getting it in a couple of weeks.

The distribution of HHS and State funds is included on the last page of the program summary. The only expenditure for now is in the PIPP program.

LaToya Butler asked Ben about the additional outreach the Department will be doing. Ben said we are trying to encourage LAAs to also do additional outreach. Leslie Ann Lesko said that the state would be putting out more press releases to encourage the community to apply for LIHEAP and had talked about it during previous meetings.

Weatherization

Mick Prince reported that for 2019 program year there are 247 units completed. Ben said there were a few stragglers in the State and DOE grants processing because of agency issues with the requirements/reports.

Mick said for the most part, most of the grants are out and are months ahead compared to last year. There are more agencies on the report that are not accurately represented with homes completed that are in final status in WeatherWorks making it more than the 247 units stated in the program status report. He's not sure what the goal of 2,363 is but stated there is \$18 million in utilities flowing through the Community Action Agencies which are off to a slow start hoping they can pair with grant funds that will help serve more clients. It depends on how much of the utility funds get utilized. In terms of the new system, ISAC was the contractor and the project was suspended. They were months behind their timelines and the product received was not close to the requirements. DCEO decided to finalize the contract and has started a procurement process through an RFP to find another vendor. Mick also stated that DCEO/OCA has worked hard to get a system with a joint application for all three programs.

He said they are also working on 2 CFR200 procurement training to provide to the network and it has been scheduled. There were findings from the last DEO visit in relation to the 2CFR200 procurement.

The folks at WIPFLI developed a procurement manual and the regional training will begin next week for all OCA grants.

Leslie DeVore reiterated regarding the system, that DCEO had to make the best business decision and that is what was done. She said they are not dropping the idea of creating a new database, just moving forward in a different direction. Mick stated they are making improvements to the current WeatherWorks system, taking it from Windows 2000 to Windows 2008.

Aarian Smith asked when the program planning was going to resume. Leslie DeVore said it would take about six months for the procurement process and all those involved will be notified when we know more information.

LIHEAP

Leslie Ann Lesko said the LIHEAP State Plan was submitted to HHS on 8/31 and the document can be found on the LIHEAP website. She thanked everyone for their input.

The heating season began October 1st and the program is now available for seniors (60 and older) and disabled applicants. The program opens on November 1st for families with children age 5 or under and disconnected households. The program is available to all other low-income households starting December 1st.

The Energy Assistance manual was sent to the agencies on August 1, 2018. The document is available as well via LIHEAP.net in the resource links. Leslie Ann is working on some fillable forms that were requested and specially thanked Deirdre for all the help.

As we discussed previously, there is a big effort to increase our outreach efforts and spread the word about the availability of LIHEAP. The Department issued a press release announcing the program and all the LAAs also sent their releases to the local media. She reiterated that the LIHEAP benefit amounts were also increased this year. In addition, the regulated utilities are including messages in the customer's bills + websites. We hope that these efforts will help us increase the number of households assisted through LIHEAP this year.

A total of \$5,142,509 is being spent on behalf of 17,283 customers receiving LIHEAP benefits. See breakdown by LAA in the Program Status Report. As of October 15, statewide, there were 36,925 applicants, a 6% increase from last year. Chris Brinkham asked of those 36,925, if 17,283 has been accepted, are the rest in progress or declined for various reasons. Lesko Ann explained by saying that applications have a 30-day window to be approved or denied and therefore, they are in pending or ready for register status which is the next step before payment is approved.

Knox County Health Department is our new LIHEAP/PIPP provider for Knox county. In previous meetings we discussed the Department was going to start collecting information on LIHEAP applicants that have an alternative supplier. We added a new data set in our LIHEAP application process starting October 1st to start collecting this information. Unfortunately, we had IT issues and had to remove this from LIHEAP.net. However, we are getting ready to deploy the change again in the system by sometime next week.

All vendor agreements have been signed except for one that we are still working with that utility. It should be signed by the end of this week/early next. Maria will send each utility the signed copy by next week. Leslie Ann thanked all the utilities for working with us in a timely manner.

Maria discussed the LIHEAP Performance Measures which is a report that is due to HHS by January 31, 2019, where we work with the regulated utilities to collect data. The files will be sent between this Friday or next Monday, so the utilities provide us with the annual bill and annual usage data for these LIHEAP customers. She said they handle that with DCEO-IT and regulated utilities and vendors. She thanked the utilities for also working with us in this report. We have now been collecting this data for three years.

PIPP

PIPP Recertification- Maria Gallardo reported that the LAAs have been recertifying the customers since July 1st and a total of 16,342 customers have been recertified to date. She said some customers dropped because of over income and other reasons.

2019 Program Year Start-Up- The Department has allocated a total of \$40 million for PIPP which is the same as the prior year. Currently, there are 17 agencies that are accepting new PIPP customers starting in October. OCA advised 12 LAAs not to take new customers in October given they experienced Lack of Funds (LOF) status during the Recertification summer months. Maria said in the last PIPP Steering Meeting, there was a request to get the names of the agencies that were not taking applications. She said she will send the list by no later than next week.

Maria indicated that currently we have 22,797 households enrolled in PIPP. See the PAC Program Status Report for a breakdown by LAA.

Ben Moore stated that the some of the agencies were at their capacity when the recertification period started, the True-Up sometimes brought them above what their previous year was which made the allocation amount higher. He said some of the grantees had to shift some of the funds that were for regular LIHEAP customers over to PIPP to maintain those customers and those are the agencies that will not be taking new customers but did provide enough funding to maintain the customers that were enrolled.

Maria stated that they had three meetings over the past couple of months about PIPP. She said one was the regular quarterly PIPP Steering Committee meeting and one was a Special PIPP Steering meeting on August 15. The third meeting was the Consumer Ed Subcommittee meeting. The reason for these meetings was the discussion of higher True-Ups that we are experiencing during the summer months recertifications and the group discussed how we can help these customers who had a high budget bill from the result of the higher True-Up mainly due to the colder winter weather we experienced. The group discussed: 1- utilities to create a quarterly report of customers who potentially could experience a higher true-up due to their current usage and send the list to the LAAs, so they can follow-up with these households. We talked about the Department helping to draft a letter to send to the customers and refer them to weatherization and/or utilities' energy efficiency programs to educate them on how to reduce their usage.

The Attorney General's Office is also discussing how to alert applicants about the Alternative Energy Supplier potential higher prices before they switch to a supplier. The pamphlets will let the customers know that LIHEAP is available.

OCA will also discuss internally what kind of data we are collecting in STARS that could be helpful to provide to the LAAs and help these customers, like cross reference with IHWAP.

A follow-up meeting will be scheduled to discuss these strategies further and determine next steps.

Dave Baron asked Maria if we would expect the first report (PIPP households experiencing a higher usage) to be due in January of 2019. Maria said there are still details to be worked on and agreed with the group and that we will know more later.

Barbara Richardson asked if households with an imminent threat of disconnection will be able to apply for LIHEAP on November 1. Leslie Ann reiterated that these households can start applying on November along with the disconnected households.

Other Business

Aimee English asked for the list of LAAs that are currently accepting PIPP applications. Leslie DeVore said Maria will be sending the list soon. She also reiterated that PIPP applications will be taken as long as funds are available until the end of December.

Jack Erffmeyer asked what the reporting period of the PIPP status report is. Maria said it includes data from July through the present. Many of these households were recertified from previous years. In other words, the total amount includes households recertified and new customers. Jack asked if the LAAs are seeing any impact of the Federal Administration “Public Charge” rule changes. Even though the rule excludes LIHEAP, there are concerns that the existence of the rule will have effect on all assistance programs. The AG’s office has heard that another state office has received calls from customers concerned that if they apply for LIHEAP or other assistance programs, that their members of their family might have citizenship/residency applications denied. Maria responded that we have not seen a direct impact, but we will keep an eye on it.

Meeting Schedule

The next PAC meeting will be held on January 31, 2019.

Adjournment.

Meeting was adjourned.