



**Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity**

JB Pritzker, Governor

**Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) Steering Committee
Minutes of Meeting Held on October 10, 2019**

Attendance in Springfield

Mindy Browning, ERBA; Kathy Walk, CEFS; Deirdre Coughlin, DCEO; Leslie Ann Lesko, DCEO; Ben Moore, DCEO; Marie McLean Mueller, DCEO; David Wortman, DCEO; Angela Baldwin, DCEO

Attendance in Chicago

Mionia Booker, CEDA; Abigail Miner, Office of the Attorney General; Shahi Nawab, CEDA; Kimberly Roberts, CEDA; Maria Gallardo, DCEO

Attendance via Telephone

Melanie Brown, Ameren; Aimee English, Citizens Utility Board; Abby Helms, Madison Co.; Michelle Machay, Peoples Gas; Jennifer Marten, Nicor Gas; Norma Maisonet, Kendall-Grundy; Ashley Miller, DuPage County; Jim Monk, IL Energy Assoc.; Lauren Pashayan, Land of Lincoln; Ellen Rendos, Nicor Gas; Barbara Richardson, Legal Aid Chicago; Lucy Sanchez, Lake Co.; Eric Schrader, Peoples Gas; Aarian Smith, ComEd; Eric Schrader, Peoples Gas

Call to Order

David Wortman called the meeting to order with introductions.

Approval of Minutes

There were no corrections from the July 11, 2019 minutes. The motion to approve the minutes was done by Mindy Browning and seconded by Kathy Walk. The minutes were approved.

Program Update

Leslie Ann Lesko gave an update of the program. She indicated a total of \$22,250,818 is annually obligated on behalf of 20,930 customers enrolled in PIPP. The average PIPP benefit is \$1,063. A breakdown of the total enrolled households per LAA was provided via email (a chart with each agency and the current total enrolled household), which totals 20,930 active PIPP households. The average benefit last year was \$1,058. Last year, we were obligating a total of \$23,866,750 annually on behalf of 22,547 customers enrolled in PIPP as of Oct. 9, 2018.

New Program Year 2020 PIPP Enrollments

Maria Gallardo stated that the department is allocating a total of \$40 million for PIPP in the new program year. This is the same amount allocated in PY19. However, we have an additional \$10 million (as needed) to allocate to agencies that prove they have a need to serve additional customers. She thanked fiscal for their help in working with the agencies.

One of the goals this year is to also allow the general (December) population to apply for PIPP. Therefore, OCA has been working with the LAAs and based on funding availability, some LAAs will open PIPP in October-December; some others may accept new customers in November and/December or each month until the amount of available funds is exhausted.

Approximately 34 of the 35 LAAs will accept new applicants. OCA is having further discussions with the LAA that initially indicated they will not take applications. Maria also explained that the process will not be perfect as this is the first time trying this, but we will have lessons learned for sure.

Lauren Pashayan asked if the agency that is not accepting new applicants have on-going enrollments. Maria said they have run out of funds in the past but will further discuss this with the agency to find a way to open PIPP to new households.

Aarian Smith asked if any other service areas besides CEDA are starting in November. Maria said everyone will start in October based on the responses received so far. OCA will continue to work with CEDA to make sure they will be able to take new PIPP applications in December.

Melanie Brown asked for the name of the agency who is not planning to accept the new enrollments. Maria said it was Champaign County. However, as previously mentioned OCA will continue to work with the agency to find a solution. Melanie also inquired about the program status report and asked how the PIPP households are disbursed throughout the territory. She mentioned that she expected to see smaller agencies with smaller enrollments. She has seen larger agencies with small enrollments and wondered if anyone questioned that. Maria said it is tricky and there are a couple of factors. One is that some agencies are being conservative. She also said there have been a lot of processing in STARS which in the past, they have been working more with them seeing what they can handle. However, at this point, OCA feels that since a lot of automation has taken place in STARS, we are taking a different approach in working with the LAAs, hoping to see more enrollments. Maria also said that some agencies may look like they have funding availability but are in areas where the funds are available, but applicants are not choosing PIPP because of various reasons.

Maria said in CEDA's case, they have the situation of having combination households where you have Peoples Gas and ComEd, when Peoples Gas runs out of funds faster than ComEd, and therefore, they cannot continue enrolling those households with ComEd only. As a result, ComEd budget line will still have funding available that later on is transferred to the LIHEAP budget to be used in eligible households.

David Wortman stated that he wants to use the Census Bureau data to determine the percentage of eligible people being served for the programs and see how each agency is performing. This will help show how the programs can be advanced with all agencies.

Lauren Pashayan said based on some past experiences, she feels the intake process and how difficult it is to access some agencies, has had a big impact on how many clients are enrolled. David agreed and stated that is what OCA needs to find out, so we know how to proceed. He said the goal is to find out the best practices for all agencies.

Mindy Browning asked if anyone thought about needing the extra \$10M yet. Ben Moore and Marie Mueller said they have agencies that have request it already.

Other Business

STARS-PIPP IT Contract - Maria Gallardo provided an update and indicated the Department posted a new Invitation for Bid (IFB) and we have now a new contract that started in October. Kestner Consulting is the vendor who won the bid. They are mostly doing maintenance and enhancements. Mindy asked when will the contract end. Maria stated the contract duration is for two (2) years.

Abigail Miner asked about the alternative energy supplier data collection in STARS-PIPP. Maria responded that OCA needs to further discuss with the IT contractors to better understand whether the data is somehow being collected. Otherwise, we will need to discuss how we can start the process.

Admin and Program Support for PIPP customers receiving \$0 State Benefit Follow-Up Discussion

Maria said during the July PIPP Steering meeting, we discussed whether the utilities can pay the LAAs the Admin and Program Support costs associated with taking these customers' PIPP applications given they have an ARP balance but no State-PIPP benefit. A utility said some utilities were paying their admin cost for PIPP out of the 40 cents and they believed we (State) can pay the LAAs for these applications out of the 40 cents. As you know, we currently pay the agencies for admin and program support based on expenditures (customers served). OCA is discussing this with DCEO-Legal to know what is allowable. The goal is to continue the discussion but are not anticipating having a resolution on this today but want to keep this agenda item opened because it will take a while to get it figured out. Maria also stated that the utilities are consulting with their legal units to determine how they pay for Admin and Program Support.

Maria asked if there was an update from the utilities on this. Aarian Smith said that "if" it happened, it would come out of the .40 which is noted for PIPP admin cost vs the .08 which is used for the arrearage reduction. She said they did not get into the logistics of how to pay, what to pay or if they were going to pay at all. It was their interpretation of the Energy Assistance Act.

Melanie Brown said she couldn't speak with her legal in time for the meeting but didn't think their interpretation would be any different than ComEd's interpretation. She is not in favor of this. She asked if an applicant has zero benefit and an ARP benefit, whether they would be allowed to

choose PIPP. Maria said that based on the program rules, these applicants can get enrolled in PIPP. Leslie Ann explained by saying if Ameren customers have no state benefits but have an ARP, they are allowed to get enrolled. Maria indicated that they can get recertified because STARS does not contain the most recent ARP balance. The data comes from the original application data timeframe.

Maria clarified that if a customer has two utilities, and both utilities have no state benefit, plus no ARP balance, then policy states these customers don't have PIPP as an option then.

Mindy Browning said the agencies cannot see if a recertification shows what the customer owes for ARP. The LAA will have to drop the customer so the ARP can be recalculated correctly when the customer gets re-enrolled. This is a work around. OCA will speak to Kestner Consulting about this issue and figure out if there is a way to see the most updated ARP balance.

The issue of customers with alternative energy suppliers was discussed as well. Kathy Walk said they send out letters trying to help customers understand that they do not have the best deal and try to get what is best for them. David Wortman suggested getting a news article to let the public know what is going on. It was recognized that the LAAs who are helping customers get off from Alternative Retail Energy Suppliers is a good strategy. Kathy said they had a reporter contact their outreach office that was referred from CUB who talked to one of the intake workers, which wanted names but did not get them. She told David she could get the contact information for him.

It looks the report of PIPP customers with a \$0 PIPP benefit but had an ARP benefit (as discussed in the July meeting) includes discrepancies with the ARP amounts shown. Maria reminded everyone that the data previously discussed was from March is different now (October) since it is a moving target. Leslie Ann informed everyone that Kestner Consulting ran this special report. It was further discussed how the ARP came about from month to month when the reports are run. Kathy said the utilities have better data and that's where it should come from.

Kathy suggested that OCA looks at the report to determine which customers actually have a zero benefit and an ARP benefit because she had customers with zero benefit and no ARP. Kathy felt she should move them to a program that will help them get a higher benefit amount. David asked if the LAAs could look at the maximum ARP from the previous year to see that the customer was not behind. Maria explained the data from STARS does not show the most updated amount. It was further discussed that it comes down to what is best for the customers.

Lauren asked if it would be useful knowing the agencies this is impacting. Maria said out of the 221 customers, there were about 15 agencies that have customers in this status and thought it was a good idea to look the data up by their utility.

2020 PIPP Steering Committee Meetings Frequency Discussion

OCA requested the Committee's feedback about meeting frequency for next year. It was decided to leave the meeting frequency to quarterly. Mindy suggested that the meeting could be cancelled if there is nothing to talk about. Leslie Ann and David agreed.

Also, OCA requested the Committee to forward any agenda items a month before the next meeting, so OCA can be prepared accordingly, especially when data is needed for the discussion.

Creation of PIPP Steering Subcommittee

David Wortman indicated the group had a productive discussion concerning the proposal of graduating customers out of PIPP when they have no ARP balance left and have participated in the program for 4 years. This idea could help other households (that are also eligible) to have access to PIPP.

There were strong opinions about the limitation of a PIPP customer duration idea and it was decided the best way to continue with a discussion is to leave this item for the April quarterly meeting. David reiterated there is no proposal on the table at this time. The goal of this special meeting in April is to bring data to the group and discuss: 1- whether there are issues with program access in some local areas and 2- what to do about this, if anything.

Aarian Smith provided updates regarding the Supplemental Arrearage Reduction Program (SARP) that ComEd will start in October. The utility will begin identifying eligible customers to enroll in this program. They are LIHEAP recipients who have a past due balance of \$500 or above. ComEd will send letters to each customer advising them to contact the Care Team to enroll via email or calling hotline. More details will follow. The enrollment will begin November 1 and the program will be available until enrollment limits are met. Those limits are to be determined. ComEd will complete all the enrollments with graduation and everything in between. They are not asking the agencies to do anything currently. If customers have questions, ComEd asked the agencies to have them contact them via email or the hotline. Aarian said once legal approve the letter, they will send out copies to the agencies for reference. Hopefully ComEd will be receiving in a couple of weeks.

Meeting Schedule

The annual meeting schedule will be announced to the group at a later date.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned.