

**Electric Assistance Program
Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
June 13, 2019**

Participants:

Amanda Noonan, New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission
Rorie Patterson, New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission
Gary Cronin, New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission
Janice Johnson, Eversource
Margarita Campbell, Eversource
Shannon Nolin, Belknap-Merrimack Community Action
Jeanne Agri, Belknap-Merrimack Community Action
Sue Corson, Unutil
Tracy Desmarais, Office of Strategic Initiatives
Eileen Smigowski, New Hampshire Office of Strategic Initiatives
Nicole Harris, Liberty
Jessica Allen, Liberty

Minutes: Commission Staff

The above members of the Advisory Board met via teleconference today to discuss possible programmatic changes to the EAP. In advance of the meeting, Eversource, Liberty, and NHEC circulated data related to residential customers who use more than 750 kWh of electricity per month. The objective was to collect this information to inform consideration of a change to the 750 kWh threshold.

Staff noted at the beginning of the meeting that NHEC and the OCA had informed Staff of their unavailability for today's meeting.

The group discussed the data provided by the utilities. UES indicated that it was still collecting its data.

The group discussed increasing the 750 kWh threshold, which could enable increased assistance for customers with high usage due to medical problems or electric heat. Staff reminded the group of the importance of having a basis for any change to the program design, which is consistent with the prior recommendations of the Board, particularly when the program was last wholly designed. Staff recounted the objective at that time, which was to provide enough financial assistance to result in a low-income customer paying approximately 4% of their income for electricity. The benchmark for that level of assistance was based on data related to average electricity usage of all residential customers in NH. To gauge changes to the benchmark, the group decided that updated data should be collected about the percentage of income all NH residential customers pay for electricity now. OSI and the CAA agreed to collect and circulate that data to the Board. OSI will consult internal sources. The CAA will consult with the National Consumer Law Center, but will be clear that only NH-specific data is sought.

The group also decided that it would be helpful to consider the percentage of customers who fell under the 750 kWh cap, when it was recommended, and the number of customers that would fall under an 850 kWh cap at this time. The group discussed that, to the extent that the same or a similar number of customers are below both caps (then and now), the Board may have a better basis to recommend increasing the threshold to 850 kWh now. The CAA agreed to collect and circulate the data.

The group discussed an idea raised in an earlier meeting that of shifting EAP funds to the energy efficiency program for low-income electricity customers. The group discussed the possibility that there are not sufficient vendors to serve the program, which would make shifting money to the program not as effective. Eversource agreed to consult with its internal expert about the status of vendor availability and of providing efficiency services to low-income customers.

The group discussed another, previously-mentioned idea, to shift EAP funds to the Neighbor Helping Neighbor Fund and Project Care, which the EAP program has done before. The group discussed the existing thresholds for assistance through those programs as well as the possibility that an infusion of funds from the EAP could enable the programs to provide higher, more meaningful individual grants to customers. Eversource, Liberty, and UES agreed to discuss the idea of EAP shifting funds into the NHN program at the next NHN Board meeting on July 12, 2019. Staff agreed to talk with NHEC about the idea of shifting funds from the EAP to Project Care.

The group briefly discussed other options, such as using a higher usage threshold only in the winter, adding another tier to the program, and changing the income ranges used for the different tiers. Staff took the position that making multiple changes to the program design would require a comprehensive and thoughtful program redesign. Staff expressed willingness to undertake a redesign, but reminded the group that such an undertaking would take time and careful consideration of the program's policies and the impact that any changes would have to the EAP fund.

Staff took the position that, without a program re-design effort, it would only support one change at a time, because it is important to be able to see the impact of each change on the EAP fund. Staff recommended that the group identify the change it wanted to proceed with. The consensus of the group was to proceed with recommending the change from 200% of federal poverty guidelines to 60% of state median income, as discussed in-depth during the May 9, 2019 meeting. The group discussed the modest impact on the EAP Fund, which the increased income-eligibility threshold is expected to have, but also how proceeding with the increased threshold will give the Board time to consider any unanticipated consequences of the change and to evaluate in-depth any other ideas for using the EAP fund, in a manner that is consistent with the law as well as the Board's past recommendations.

The group agreed that the Board would table further discussion about changes to the EAP program design until the next Board meeting on July 26, 2019.

ACTION ITEMS:

- 1) OSI will collect and circulate current data reflecting the percentage of income all NH residential customers pay for electricity;**
- 2) The CAA will collect and circulate current data reflecting the percentage of income all NH residential customers pay for electricity, to the extent that such data is collected by the NCLC;**
- 3) The CAA will collect and circulate data reflecting the percentage of EAP-eligible customers who fell under the 750 kWh cap, when it was recommended, and the number of such customers that would fall under an 850 kWh cap if one were implemented at this time;**
- 4) Eversource will consult with, and report back to the Board about the consultation with, the company's internal energy-efficiency expert about the status of vendor availability and of providing efficiency services to low-income customers;**
- 5) Eversource, Liberty, and UES will discuss the idea of shifting EAP funds to NHN at the NHN meeting on July 12 and will report the result of that discussion to the Board;**

- 6) Staff will discuss the idea of shifting EAP funds to Project care with NHEC, and NHEC will provide feedback to the Board about that idea; and
- 7) At its next meeting on July 26, 2019, the Board will consider the information collected as a result of today's meeting, as described herein, and will make a decision about whether to recommend to the Commission a change to the income-eligibility threshold.

Next meeting: July 26, 2019
NH Public Utilities Commission
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