

**Electric Assistance Program
Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
May 9, 2019
Conference Call**

Participants:

Amanda Noonan, New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission
Rorie Patterson, New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission
Gary Cronin, New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission
Pradip Chattopadhyay, New Hampshire Office of Consumer Advocate
Shannon Nolin, Belknap-Merrimack Community Action
Sue Corson, Unutil
Lisa Sheehy, New Hampshire Electric Cooperative
Tracy Desmarais, Office of Strategic Initiatives
Janice Johnson, Eversource
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, Commission Staff circulated projections of the impact on the EAP Fund if the income eligibility threshold increased from 200% of Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG) to 60% of State Median Income (SMI).

Staff summarized the assumptions used in developing the projections:

- Average monthly enrollment of 30,300 customers;
- Average monthly benefit to all EAP customers of \$37.64;
- Average monthly benefit to Tier 2 customers of \$8.50;
- 2,973 households who qualified for FAP but not EAP in 2018; and
- 500 households per month added after July 1, 2019 (until 2,973 households enrolled).

Staff reminded the group that, if the income eligibility threshold increased to 60% SMI, the Board should consider how to communicate information about eligibility levels to customers. Today, the brochure includes a table displaying household size and 30 day and annual income figures. Staff stated it did not know how a change to an eligibility threshold of 60% SMI would affect that type of display.

OSI provided a comparison for a household of two under the existing eligibility threshold of 200% FPG and under the proposed threshold 60% SMI. To qualify under the existing threshold, the household's monthly income could not exceed \$2,780. Under 60% SMI, the household's monthly income could not exceed \$3,543, a \$763 difference. For a household of four, the difference would be \$977. For comparison, 60% SMI corresponds to approximately 230% to 240% of FPG.

Although changing the income eligibility threshold to 60% SMI for the EAP would not significantly affect the balance of the EAP fund, doing so would provide parity to the income eligibility threshold currently used by the Fuel Assistance Program (FAP). Parity between the two programs would decrease customer confusion and provide increased energy security. There is no guarantee that FAP will continue to use 60% SMI, however. The FAP is a federally funded program, and the income eligibility threshold for the FAP depends on the level of federal funding, something which is typically not known until October.

Call participants discussed other possible programmatic changes, including increasing the kWh threshold, currently 750 kWh, and increasing the discount percentages. Since there is little room to increase the 76% discount and retain the proportionality of the other discount tiers, the focus of the discussion was on increasing the kWh threshold.

A study done in 2010 by Eversource and the Community Action Agency EAP Administrator evaluated the usage of 14,000 households enrolled in the EAP for 12 months in 2009. The average monthly usage of those customers was 588 kWh, and 70% of the participants had usage below 700 kWh. In DE 10-192, the Advisory Board recommended, and the Commission approved, a 700 kWh cap on the usage to which the discount applied. That usage cap was later increased to 750 kWh. The usage cap recommendation of the Advisory Board reflected a balancing of the importance of conservation, providing assistance with “essential electricity requirements,” and maximizing the efficient use of limited funds for the EAP. The Advisory Board has discussed updating the 2010 study in prior meetings. During the call, the participants agreed that updating the average monthly usage for EAP customers and for residential customers as a whole was the appropriate first step in determining whether an updated usage study is necessary. Staff asked the utilities to provide the average monthly usage for (1) residential customers as a whole (including those who participate in the EAP), and (2) for EAP customers. Only customers with 12 months of usage history should be included in the calculation of average usage. The requested information will be circulated to the Advisory Board by **Friday, May 17, 2019**.

Discussion also included transferring some amount of the EAP fund to targeted energy efficiency measures for EAP participants. Factors for targeting could include customers with high usage and medical customers.

Discussion about using EAP funds for targeted energy efficiency, increasing the eligibility threshold to 60% SMI, the usage data expected from the utilities and whether updating the 2010 study is necessary, will continue during a conference call on May 21, 2019, at 9:00 am. Participants agreed one comprehensive recommendation for programmatic changes would be filed with the Commission.

ACTION ITEMS:

1) By Friday, May 19, utilities circulate (1) the average monthly usage for residential customers as a whole (including those who participate in the EAP), and (2) the average monthly usage for EAP customers. Only customers with 12 months of usage history should be included in the calculation of average usage.

**Next meeting: May 21, 2019 at 9:00am (teleconference)
1-866-951-1151
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