

EAP Advisory Board

10/23/2020 Meeting Minutes

Participants: Rorie Patterson (PUC), Eileen Smiglowksi (OSI), Janice Johnson (Eversource), Sue Corson (Unitil), Lisa Sheehy (NHEC), Jessica Arnold (Liberty), Steve Tower (NHLA), Ray Burke (NHLA), Karen Emis-Williams (NHMWDA), Pradip Chattopadhyay (OCA), Kristen LaPanne (BMCA)

Discussion:

- i. Review of final drafted version of July 24, 2020 minutes** – draft circulated by Sue and approved unanimously by board
- ii. EAP fund balance/new enrollment data**
 - a. Per Weekly EAP Report, 30,311 household enrolled as of September 29th and utilities reconciliation report totaled 31,618. Difference of 1,307, CAA and utilities to determine reason of enrollment discrepancy
 - b. Utilities agree to receiving little or no request to remove households from the CAAs since deciding in March to stop EAP removals
 - c. Reasons for EAP households being removed during moratorium:
 - i. Account closing
 - ii. Moving
 - iii. Death of COR, no other members within home
 - iv. Denied over income
 - d. Eversource and CAA currently working on bi-annual reconciliation of accounts
 - e. Concern of continued low number of enrollments especially during state of emergency. Mention of SNAP enrollments increasing 3,000-4,000 since COVID-19. Link to DHHS enrollment numbers shared:
<https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dehs/documents/dehs-covid-10192020.pdf>
 - f. Discussion of adding language on applying for EAP and FAP to DHHS and NHES websites
- iii. Discussion to spend down surplus**
 - a. Enrollments have not increased as expected despite previous efforts to implements changes to EAP guidelines such as income levels, kWh and tiers
 - b. What are other programs doing?
 - i. SNAP increased benefits to highest possible per household regardless of income level (clarified no increase in income eligibility, only benefits received)
 - ii. FAP providing additional \$200 to every eligible household regardless of benefit and income level (U Cares Act funding)
 - c. Suggested temporary tier/kWh changes
 - i. Increase discount tier percentages

- ii. Raise minimum tier level households can qualify for, i.e., all eligible tier 2 & 3 would receive tier 4 while 4 & 5 might remain the same
 - d. Suggested one-time Lump Sum Benefit
 - i. Credit to EAP enrolled such as \$100 to each households
 - ii. Credit depending on eligible tier level such as tier 2 = \$100, tier 3 = \$125, tier 4 = \$150, etc.
 - iii. Should households be targeted or should all receive?
 - e. For temporary changes, board should look to approve what is easiest to implement and causes the least amount of burden on agencies and utilities as well as least costly. Permanent changes will need to be discussed further.
 - f. Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, 10/27/2020 with utilities and CAA to discuss options and impacts to IT, fiscal and CAAs.
 - g. Tentative follow-up meeting with board on 11/6/2020 to share discussion and findings from 10/27/2020 meeting
 - h. Other discussions
 - i. Revisiting 750 kWh cap, members still in agreeance of previous determination that this change would not prove to be affect in spending down surplus timely
 - ii. Update on possibility of new FAP/EAP software
 - 1. Eileen confirmed not expected to happen anytime soon due to pandemic, short staffed, and no response to RFP posted last year
- iv. **EAP Data re: applications, redeterminations, denials**
 - a. Has there been spike in applications since extra \$600 from unemployment ended on 7/25/2020?
 - i. FAP and EAP monthly meeting held on 10/21/2020 with CAA energy directors
 - 1. Not a noticeable increase at this time
 - 2. Agencies short staffed, some working from home and not having face-to-face interviews, most appointments being done by phone or mail-in
 - 3. CAAs feel at this time they are handling same amount of applications as this time last season
 - ii. Expected increase in EAP referrals/applications as utility customers self-certify for hardship payment arrangements
 - 1. Eversource had 134 households self-certify to date
 - 2. Unutil has 3 households self-certify to date
 - 3. Liberty will provide information at a later date (confirmed later on 10/26, 15 customers have self-certified)
 - 4. NHEC has had no self-certification to date. As calls come in, representatives are educating members of topic
 - b. Handling of EAP removals since disconnection moratorium has lifted

- i. Total number of state pending removals is 1373, this includes only households that have not yet recertified after being notified to do so by letter
- ii. Kristen to gather data from CAAs of households that have reapplied and not completed application, denied insufficient documents
- iii. No concern from CAAs that applicants are having a difficult time obtaining required documentation due to pandemic
- iv. Board members agree that they are not opposed to keeping households on EAP due to current state of emergency and winter months approaching. Applicants applying for FAP can apply or recertify for EAP at the same time
- v. Mention of other programs beginning to stagger their program recertification's. Suggested EAP could stagger by tier level starting with tier 2 and working through to tier 6
- vi. Kristen will work with the CAAs to address a plan for removals and recertification's which could potentially start between Feb-April. Plan to be discussed during January advisory board meeting.
- vii. Outreaching follow-up from utilities
 - 1. Eversource, Unitil and NHEC confirmed outreaching made to all EAP customers
 - 2. Liberty will follow-up on this topic
- c. Update from CAA about adding language to EAP denial letters regarding 30 days to supply requested information
 - i. Additional language has been added
 - ii. Also added that households can apply anytime throughout the year if they experience changes in household members or income
- v. **Review of BRD of potential web application from River Delta Consulting, Inc.**
 - a. Kristen reviewed document via screen sharing method
 - b. Discussed 2 possible options
 - i. Option 1: \$50,000-\$100,000, fully automated approach that could import data into FAP/EAP system, ability to have more features
 - ii. Option 2: \$15,000-\$25,000, completed application sent via email as PDF to be entered into the system by staff with minimal features
 - iii. Both options would allow uploading of documentation by applicant. Costs do not included fees for maintaining this secure web application database, TBD depending on selected option and features
 - iv. Create committee to include CAA staff users, Ray and Steve from NHLA to establish important features and brainstorming. Suggested to recruit housing relief staff as they have experience with a web based inquiry/application

- v. CAAs would still need to verify documentation and eligibility requirements, no automatic approval
- vi. Shared link that all NH residents would access, system would determine which CAA receives notification by selected town physical address
- vii. FAP and EAP application to be done together with option to choose one or the other. Have brief descriptions/help options throughout app
- viii. Web application to be built with the idea of being compatible with a future FAP/EAP software

vi. Other Business

- a. PY 19/20 EAP budget for one of the CAAs is expected to have remaining balance of \$20,281.31 due to COVID-19; less travel, salary and other categories affected
- b. Utility Webinar for Social Agencies went very well, Hardship and Re-start of Collection. Currently working on customer based webinar scheduled for 11/17
- c. Request to remove Nicole Harris (Liberty) from all correspondences and replace with Christine Downing, Director of Customer Care
- d. Update on EAP brochure printing and distribution, Janice reviewed and approved morning of 10/23 and expects to be completed soon
- e. Facebook page created and maintained by Kristen, NH Electric Assistance Program – EAP or search by EAP.of.NH
 - i. Ray requested sharing of link, NHLA communications could assist in promoting
 - ii. Janice suggested adding EAP FB link to EAP slide during customer webinar

vii. Action Items

- a. Meeting on 10/27 via remote for utilities and Kristen to discuss spending of surplus options and discussing average bills. Tentative meeting scheduled to follow-up with the board on 11/6
- b. Utilities and Kristen to discuss enrollment number variances
- c. Ray, Sue and Kristen to work on language for DHHS and NHES webpages
- d. Liberty to follow-up with board on number of self-certified hardship customers and outreaching update
- e. Kristen to discuss with CAAs to plan process of removals/recertification's and follow-up with board at January meeting
- f. Kristen to coordinate a committee to discuss web application specifications
- g. Removal of Nicole Harris and addition of Christine Downing (Jessica to provide contact information)
- h. Kristen to send BRD and share Facebook link to board members
- i. Kristen to provide additional data on pending removals that have been denied and not yet sent for removal by the utilities