TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE
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Testimony Supporting Senate Bill No.983

AN ACT CONCERNING THE LOW INCOME ENERGY ADVISORY BOARD

Senator Fonfara, Representative Nardello and distinguished members of the Energy and Technology Committee thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill No. 983, An Act Concerning the Low Income Energy Advisory Board.

The Low Income Energy Advisory Board was created in 2005 as a vehicle to bring together the various stakeholders that are impacted by the State's annual low income assistance program, CEAP. Over the past three years, the Board has met and provided recommendations to myself, the Commissioner of the Department Social Services (DSS) and the Chairman of the Department of Public Utility Control (DPUC) on a number of items it felt we, individually or collectively, should consider to improve the implementation and coordination of energy assistance programs. One such recommendation was the movement to an "early intake" process for CEAP. The early intake process allows families to apply for energy assistance beginning in August, rather than waiting until October or November. This has dramatically reduced waiting time for applicants and results in applicants being able to access their benefits earlier in the winter heating season.

The current structure of the Board has OPM sitting in the position as the Chair of this group. It also has the other state agencies, namely DSS and DPUC, to whom recommendations are to be forwarded sitting on the Board as voting members. This places each of these agencies in the awkward position of stating a position on a recommendation prior to it being received by the agency for consideration. The purpose of the Board is to advise; it should do so without jeopardizing the agency or agencies ability to accept or reject that advice upon due reflection and consideration of all factors.

The proposed bill seeks to make the agencies that are to receive advice from the Board as ex-officio members rather than as active, voting members going forward. This would keep the agencies at the table for the important and necessary discussions regarding administrative and/or policy issues, but without making the agency having to pre-determine the outcome of the recommendations prior to actually receiving it. As a matter of course, the chairmanship of the Board would be voted on annually by the voting members

of the Board – thereby making the Board truly an advisory group to the agencies affected.

I would like to again thank the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony. I respectfully request the Committee support this bill.