

**Testimony of the Low Income Energy Advisory Board (LIEAB)**  
**Presented by Shirley Bergert, Board Member**  
**Before the Appropriations, Human Services, and Energy & Technology Committees**  
**Regarding the 2009-2010**  
**Low Income Energy Assistance Program Block Grant Allocation Plan**  
**September 15, 2009**

LIEAB is charged by statute to “advise and assist the Office of Policy and Management and the Department of Social Services in the planning, development, implementation and coordination of energy-assistance-related programs and policies. . . and shall make recommendations to the General Assembly regarding . . . plans subject to legislative approval to ensure affordable access to residential energy services to low-income state residents.” CGS §16a-41b(b). LIEAB’s broad membership includes representatives of OPM, DSS, CAFCA, DPUC, Consumer Counsel, Commission on Aging, AARP, Operation Fuel, Infoline, Connecticut Local Administrators of Social Services, low income energy consumers, ICPA, and electric and gas utility companies.

**LIEAB has several recommendations regarding the proposed energy assistance Plan, focused on Section XIV of the Plan, “Additional Benefits/Services.”**

- **Provision should be made to authorize DSS to utilize funds for non-primary heat utility service where funding exceeds the amount needed to meet winter heating benefits specified in the Plan.** Such funds could help meet gas and electric non-primary heat related bills to avoid or resolve dangerous utility shut-offs during the non-moratorium months: May 1<sup>st</sup> through October 31<sup>st</sup>. Fuel banks have been unable to meet the growing need for assistance with these bills. To minimize any administrative burden, LIEAB proposes that only households determined eligible in the regular program be considered potentially eligible for such benefit, and information on any non-primary heat utility account be collected at the time of application for heating assistance and entered into the existing unused application category for secondary heat.
- **Supplemental payments made to utility customers should be coordinated with the existing arrearage forgiveness programs to leverage these resources.** CL&P, CNG, SCG, UI and Yankee Gas run arrearage forgiveness programs pursuant to CGS §16-262c. CL&P and UI also maintain voluntary arrearage forgiveness programs open to their non-heat customers. On occasion certain municipal utilities have also run voluntary arrearage forgiveness programs. Supplemental payments made in the energy assistance program have never been coordinated with these arrearage forgiveness programs, although the public service companies have expressed a willingness to engage in such coordination. In addition to leveraging matching payments from the utilities for supplemental payments, the payments could be used to avoid or resolve utility shut-offs and to facilitate placement of households on year around affordable payment agreements.
- **In determining how to utilize funds under Section XIV, DSS and OPM should seek the advice of LIEAB prior to making any decisions, and should notify LIEAB’s membership when a public hearing will be held on any expenditure.** This is consistent with the statute creating LIEAB, but has not necessarily been DSS and OPM’s practice. For

example, in August DSS and OPM sought and received from the legislative committees of cognizance, a Plan modification to retroactively pay shelter heating bills from last winter.

**The following modification of Section XIV are recommended to effect LIEAB's recommendations (underlining indicates new language):**

Should funds received exceed the amount required to meet the benefit levels specified in this Plan, the additional funds may be utilized to extend the program intake period, provide additional funds for furnace repairs and/or replacements to address unsafe, inoperable and/or inefficient heating systems, extend the authorization period for Basic Benefits, Crisis Assistance and/or Safety Net Assistance, provide additional Crisis Assistance and/or Safety Net Assistance benefits, provide an additional benefit on behalf of eligible utility heated households, provide a benefit for Plan beneficiaries for utility service which is not the primary source of heat, provide heating assistance to DSS-funded homeless shelters and/or implement a pre-buy program for next year's heating season.

Should contingency funds be released and designated to be used for cooling measures, funds will be used in accordance with guidance provided by HHS.

To the extent feasible, supplemental utility payments will be coordinated with utility administered arrearage forgiveness programs to leverage matching payments from the utilities, avoid or resolve utility shut-offs, and facilitate placement of eligible households on year around affordable payment agreements.

All modifications of benefits specified in this Plan and any benefits provided pursuant to this section of the Plan shall be presented to the Low Income Energy Advisory Board (LIEAB) for its input and advice prior to adoption by DSS. LIEAB members shall be provided with a description of any funds to be expended pursuant to this section prior to such expenditure.