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Energy and Technology Committee Hearing

March 4, 2010

Testimony of Shirley Bergert¹

SB 348: An Act Concerning the Low-Income Energy Advisory Board

Recommended Action:

- Adopt subsection (c) authorizing LIEAB to elect a chair and vice-chair from among its members.
- Clarify the intent of the change in subsection(a) before adopting. Adopt only if OPM provides ongoing support for the Low Income Energy Advisory Board and OPM, DSS and the DPUC remain as active LIEAB participants.

This bill proposes to modify the structure of the Low Income Energy Advisory Board (LIEAB) in two ways:

1. Subsection (c): LIEAB would annually elect a chair and vice-chair from among its membership. Currently OPM's representative serves as the chair. This is a logical change. As a member of LIEAB, I am confident that my Board colleagues would be willing to serve in these capacities.
2. Subsection (a): The intent of this proposed amendment is not clear. OPM, DSS and the DPUC would move from membership status on LIEAB to "ex-officio" membership. It is important that OPM and DSS remain as full participating members of LIEAB. LIEAB has no funding and it is critical that OPM provide supports including arranging meetings, preparing and maintaining agendas and minutes, and maintaining contact lists for interested parties. OPM and DSS control the contents of the CT Energy Assistance Program (CEAP) plan, as well as its administration. Without the information DSS provides to LIEAB, it would be impossible for LIEAB to timely suggest modifications of CEAP or successfully monitor administration of the energy assistance program or its coordination with other protections for vulnerable low income households. Similarly the DPUC has oversight of the utility arrearage forgiveness program plans, utility administered conservation programs, utility customer hardship and other protections, and rates affecting low income households. Ultimately we need to find mechanisms to ensure the myriad programs and policies affecting low income utility consumers are effectively coordinated, and LIEAB is the only body with this potential.

¹ Shirley Bergert serves: on the Low Income Energy Advisory Board (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 16a-41b); as the residential representative on the Energy Conservation Management Board overseeing the expenditure of ratepayer conservation funds in Connecticut Energy Efficiency Fund (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 16-245m); as the low income representative on the Fuel Oil Conservation Board (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 16a-22f); and on the Advisory Board of the Institute for Sustainable Energy at Eastern Connecticut State University.

