

Energy and Technology Committee
Testimony Submitted by New Opportunities, Inc.
Public Hearing – Tuesday, March 17, 2015

S.B. No. 565

AN ACT CONCERNING ENERGY AUDITS AND
HEATING ASSISTANCE

Good morning/afternoon, My name is Michael Gurecka and I am the Director of Business Development – Energy Services at New Opportunities, Inc. in Waterbury CT. New Opportunities, Inc. is a Community Action Agency and current grantee for the LIHEAP through the Department of Social Services (DSS), the U.S. Department of Energy’s Weatherization Assistance Program (DOE/WAP) through the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) and an approved Home Energy Solutions – Income Eligible (HES-IE) Vendor for Eversource and United Illuminating. I am here today to speak against the current language in Senate Bill No. 565 “An Act Concerning Energy Audits and Heating Assistance”.

I support the intent of creating greater efficiencies by providing a streamlined application and referral for both energy assistance and weatherization programs. However, the methods described in this bill to implement this, in my opinion, would provide greater confusion and may not adhere to federal grants management and auditing procedures.

For the past several years, the LIHEAP energy application and the application for the U.S. Dept. of Energy (DOE) weatherization program have been a dual application, which the community action agencies

(CAAs) have used to enroll clients. This works well to develop a database of eligible weatherization applicants.

As it stands now, an eligible applicant receives an award letter stating the amount of their energy award and a check mark stating they are also eligible for the federal DOE/WAP program. Since the income eligibility for Energy Assistance, DOE/WAP are identical and similar to HES-IE, it would be possible to streamline to include the HES-IE.

Creating efficiencies for the delivery of the CAA's programs is something that the CAA's and CAFCA continue to strive for and is always discussed. Currently, if the applicant qualifies for energy assistance they are also given the HES-IE application to fill out and return to the agency for transmittal to the utilities. With this method you rely on the applicant to follow through and in some cases they do and some cases they do not.

The other issue is the discrepancy in determining property eligibility, with the DOE/WAP having a 13-year look back and the HES-IE having an 18-month look back to qualify the client. The other programs that are mentioned in this bill, Home Energy Solutions (HES) and Home Performance with Energy Star (HPES) are primarily market driven and geared for much higher income citizens and would only prevail if a client was determined to be over income for the energy assistance program.

The development of an internet web site for applicants to register and complete an energy assistance and conservation application is the real issue. There are federal requirements to determine eligibility and verify income... this program is not a self declaration and has no categorical eligibility. Each applicant must provide all income documentation, all pages to their most recent bank statement, zero income affidavits for

anyone over 18 not in school and not working and any other pertinent info. How would this be done electronically?

As community action agencies, we pride ourselves in referring applicants to other programs that they might need. Energy assistance is not usually the only problem they are dealing with and we prefer a face to face, and if requested homebound, process to make all appropriate referrals upon giving them their letter of eligibility.

In closing, New Opportunities, Inc. and the Connecticut Association For Community Action, Inc. would be happy and available to meet with the E&T Committee, legislators, state agencies and the utilities to further discuss creating better efficiencies for the programs and services we provide to the state's most vulnerable clients in all 169 towns across CT.

Thank you,

Michael Gurecka