

HEAP Block Grant Advisory Council Meeting Thursday, August 4, 2022

A meeting of the Block Grant Advisory Council was held via WebEx on Thursday, August 4, 2022. The meeting began at 1:00 pm.

Attendees

Andrew Bryk, Director, HEAP & LIHWAP, OTDA

Andy Stone, Executive Director, NYS Weatherization Directors Association

Emily Urban, Bureau Chief, HEAP, OTDA

Kenneth Gossel, National Fuel Gas

Kira Pospesel, Commissioner, Greene County Social Services

Discussion

Ken Gossel: Good afternoon. This is Ken Gossel and welcome to the August 4th Block Grant Advisory Council meeting. I am vice-chair substituting for Sue Montgomery-Corey who could not be with us today. And since we are doing this by WebEx, I'm going to ask that we go around and identify yourselves please. Andrew, would you go first?

Andrew Bryk: Thank you. Good afternoon, Andrew Bryk, New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, the Home Energy Assistance and Low-Income Water Assistance program. And I hand off to Commissioner. There's only one on the line today.

Kira Pospesel: Good afternoon, my name is Kira Pospesel, I'm the Commissioner of Social Services in Greene County.

Ken Gossel: Next, Andy Stone. Andy Stone is on the line with us perhaps with some connection, Andrew, we just lost him.

Andrew Bryk: He was there, he was muted. So, I'll turn it over to Emily Urban.

Emily Urban: Good afternoon, Emily Urban Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, HEAP Bureau Chief.

Ken Gossel: Great, so Andy should be joining us in a moment. We probably don't have a quorum, so maybe we won't be voting on things, but normally we have a look at the minutes from last meeting here that occurred on May 5th, and I don't know if anybody wanted to, welcome Andy. You may not be connected to audio; you're looking good though.

Andrew Bryk: Unfortunately, I'm not hosting so I can't unmute you, Andy.

Andy Stone: I'm there now. Sorry, I lost my number connection, it's been happening the past couple of days.

Ken Gossel: Welcome. So, we are going to start just with the review of the May 5th, meeting minute notes. I've got a few but does anybody have any amendments or changes to that document?

Kira Pospesel: I don't.

Ken Gossel: Okay. I'll mention just a few quickly. Mostly are just grammatical, page 1 near the bottom, Andrew Bryk is Director of Home Energy Assistance the word Assistant appears in there. Page 8 I had I think it was Andy you made reference to Bryk National Grip ARP and was it PULP, it's referenced here as EPalp.

Andrew Bryk: Oh, Public Utility Law Project.

Ken Gossel: Public Utility Law Project, okay. At the very bottom of page 8...

Kira Pospesel: What page was that on the PULP reference?

Ken Gossel: Page 8. Right in the middle of the page, yep. Actually, I skipped one but the end of my first, the very first response for me, last line, arrears related forgiveness, it says arrears relate. At the bottom of page 8, three lines from the bottom, to get ready an online application it says to get really, although I would really like an online application. And I'll skip a couple of other very minor ones. And we had a couple of blanks occurring, had a lot of excitement where Andrew Bryk was muffled, I'll notice and not muzzled. But page 14 there was some discussion over water septic related participation and Andy Stone said that's allowable, Andrew Bryk, we didn't get that response. I don't know if you recall.

Andrew Bryk: Water septic was its potential, if they have arrears in their septic then we can assist them with that, yeah. So, we'll make sure that the minutes reflect the proper policy.

Kira Pospesel: And I read that muffled was actually appropriate see.

(Laughing).

Andrew Bryk: If you can't hear me, I apologize. Make sure you call me out on it. Normally, I don't have that problem.

Ken Gossel: That was between the third and fourth calls from the Commissioner, as I know you recall. Page 15 another blank, Andrew muzzled, I mean muffled again, probably serve how many households? Water I think is the discussion.

Andrew Bryk: It was probably some, right now, we're about 16,000, so I'm assuming at that point it was probably about 3,000 less, so it was somewhere between about 12 to 13,000 at that point.

Ken Gossel: Alright and the last thing I have on the very last page as we were departing, I probably said, once again, and I know I share the sentiment of the entire council that we enjoyed and benefited from working with Charlie Brennan. So, very saddened, of course, of his passing and we are very grateful for his participation.

So, with that do we move to approve the minutes as amended? I guess, do we have a quorum is the question.

Andy Stone: So moved, do we have a quorum today? Do we need a quorum?

Ken Gossel: We don't officially have one. We can probably adopt them anyway as amended and if we have to do it officially later, we can do it that way too.

Andy Stone: That's fine.

Andrew Bryk: I support that.

Ken Gossel: I'll say that's a second, all in favor?

All: Aye.

Ken Gossel: None opposed. So, with that, we'll move right to the discussion topics listed on the agenda. I'll hand it over to Andrew Bryk for the 2022/2023 program updates. That's what you have listed. You might want, is that the last year's program.

Andrew Bryk: I think that was supposed to be 21/22 and...

Ken Gossel: 21/22 program update

Andrew Bryk: And I'm going to throw that right over to the HEAP Bureau Chief, Emily Urban.

Emily Urban: Alright, thanks. Yeah, so this is the 21/22 program update, so this is the year that we are currently finishing up right now. So, our final funding for this year for 21/22 was \$382 million, 376 of that was from formula funding from the Block Grant and then another \$6 million from the infrastructure funding which is funding we will get for the next 5 years, Andrew, correct me if I'm wrong.

Andrew Bryk: You are correct.

Emily Urban: We also received the \$575 million in ARPA funding. We had through September 30, 2022 to spend that, so even though we got that 2 years ago, it was part of last year's state plan, we did spend the majority of that this year, so last year we did take some of that 575 apply it to administrative funds and weatherization, the remainder was used this program year to operate RAS, ERAP and then the remainder of funds were just used for regular HEAP benefits. So, on top of that 382, we had the remaining funds from ARPA as well.

So, with the regular benefit component, are closed right now so that opened up on October 1st, 2021, closed April 29th, 2022. As of right now, our benefits are up about 200,000 over this time last year, but this time last year regular was still operating, whereas this year we've closed several months ago now. So, year over year, I would say we were up significantly. So, right now we are at about 1.7 million benefits compared to last year about 1.5 million, and then our average heater benefit is \$487.00. So, really successful year with regular benefits. We will see how that comes out in our households served report, because as you know, benefits aren't necessarily an indicator of the number of households. So, really interested to see how many more households we're serving this year as opposed to last year. I guess, I mean I estimate I guess that we will serve more households just because we did get a lot more households coming in this year to apply for RAS specifically and to get the RAS, they would also get a regular benefit. So, households that may not have applied for a regular benefit came in this year, got the regular and the RAS, so that would overall lead to more households served with the regular benefit. And then speaking of RAS, so we did have, was there a question on regular? So, we had our RAS benefit so that was the Regular Arrears Supplement and then we also had other arrears assistance. So, specific to RAS, we ran that from September 22nd, 2021, closed that on March 15th, 2022. We allocated \$275 million to this benefit. Right now, it's looking like we're going to end up about 160,000 RAS benefits.

Again, benefits not households. On the average RAS benefit was about \$1,721.00. So, those benefits were up to \$10,000 per household for gas or electric arrears. So, we allocated 275, we actually landed about 276 when all was said and done, after those pending benefits. We still have a few pending benefits that are in the works right now as the districts are finishing up pending applications. So, we estimate we will land right around 276 for RAS. So, where RAS left off, we also had ERAP and then additional Utility Arrears Assistance through DPS. So, those two benefits helped even more households after those RAS funds were exhausted. So, we're expected to disperse about \$100 million in utility arrears assistance through ERAP when all is said and done. Again, a lot of those are pending right now, but we do expect to land right about the \$100 million that we allocated to that benefit for ERAP. And then the utilities and OTDA, we are working with DPS to get an additional \$250 million in utility arrears assistance out the door. So, this is part of the state budget \$250 million was provided to DPS to do our Utility Arrears Assistance. Those benefits are being provided directly to the utility vendors on behalf of their customers with utility arrears. So, OTDA has been working with the utilities with DPS on identifying as many low-income households as possible for the enrollment in this benefit. So, to get that benefit, the house would have to be enrolled in their utilities Energy Affordability Program, each of the utilities have them. So, we've been trying to get as many households enrolled in that. So, some data exchanges with the utilities, and then we are also just this week have sent out letters to SNAP households to let those households know if they're not already enrolled in that EAP through the utility to enroll as soon as possible and then they can take advantage of that utility Arrears Assistance. So, a lot of arrears assistance out there. Hopefully, we are in great shape when this fall comes that we're not starting out with arrears as the cold weather hits. So, fingers crossed, all of that goes as planned. We are getting phone calls already at OTDA about people looking for these benefits, so we know the word is out. We are trying to spread it as much as we can, and they need the assistance, and we would love to be able to assist them in any way we can.

Ken Gossel: Let me jump in Emily just to alert everybody exactly I think where the major utilities are anyway. Almost all of us, I think all of us have begun issuing those credits and it's even a little bit more broad than the \$250 million that you mentioned. What had happened back in June is the Public Service Commission pursuant to an application by the utilities and other stakeholders in a phase 1 they authorized relief for indebtedness or arrears of low-income customers that would include both that \$250 million in state legislature funds that you talked about plus also additional funding through utility rate payers and what it is doing is doing, for all of those customers, it would wipe out arrears, identified customers through May 1st of this year. So, even pre-COVID arrears would be included, and all of the utilities really have begun providing those credits to customers, some are doing it through a bill cycle so, by the end of August for instance, everybody who is identified and as mentioned are participants in our EAP programs should have received those credits. In National Fuel's case this week, we did receive our 1.75% or so of the \$250 million, so the State Department of Public Service worked with all utilities to get all the required documentation and contracts in, and we've already received the funds and we are in the process of about to do our credits. But all the other utilities are in the same boat and it's a really good place to be. So, thank you. There is coordination, a great amount that OTDA provided with respect to providing us ERAP lists and things like that because we had to ensure first that those monies are applied before the other credits are applied. So, Andrew Bryk, I see you have your hand up.

Andrew Bryk: Yeah, I'm trying to actually follow the rules of the meeting. I just want to flag something because of that. So, the timeframe and those credits are getting bills and I got an inquiry yesterday from a utility and a local district. So, Commissioner keep your ears out. Three-month, four-month breakdowns: so, people paying in this particular situation got a HEAP payment in March, hasn't made a payment since. Then got the credit in August, then that went through May. So, now they have June, July and they don't have enough time to do the 131S calculation so, because the household still is in arrears and still has a threat of a shut off. And I don't have an answer on that. I did refer Rensselaer County; I'll be very blunt over to our temporary assistance unit to make sure that if there is a household with an immediate need how could that be addressed.

Ken Gossel: Thank you. I will also add, all of the utilities have had sizeable outreach efforts as well to find new customers and bring them into their EAP programs, so all of them now have online an application and an ability for customers to upload information whether its SNAP, we pretty much have the HEAP stuff captured but other types of assistance benefits that qualify, and for any of those newly identified customers, through the end of the year when they self-certify or self-identify excuse me, and then we do a certification and put them in our EAP, they will get the same credit through May 1st of their arrears.

Andrew Bryk: That's great, great program. I hope that puts us in really good shape especially as we enter into the cold weather period. I know we're all really warm today, a month from now we're going to have a different conversation.

Ken Gossel: Yes. So, thank you Emily back to you.

Emily Urban: Yeah, no, thank you, Ken, I should have just let you explain it from the beginning.

Ken Gossel: Oh, you did a great job.

Emily Urban: I appreciate all that information. Alright, so that's all I had for arrears. Are there any questions or anything else you would like addressed about arrears, RAS, ERAP? Okay.

So, we had our Emergency Benefit component that was also a really robust program this year. \$90 million was allocated to emergency. We had our first emergency that ran from January 2nd through July 20th. Our second and third emergency opened up on February 22nd and May 2nd respectively, and those also closed on July 20th, 2022. So, about 135,000 first emergency benefits and 30,000 second and third emergency benefits combined. That average benefit for the first emergency was \$686 and the average benefit for the second emergency was \$757, so really high. So, we have been offering those three emergency benefits since 2020. Obviously, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the utility moratorium on shutoffs assisted households in avoiding utility shutoffs through late 2021 but many households with the deliverable fuels they were still getting into multiple emergencies, so we were able

to offer those three emergencies again this year and it really showed that the bulk of these were deliverable fuels. And that's really evidence in those average benefits \$686 for the first and \$757 for second and third. So, that's really higher than it's ever been. We were able to, we discussed this before, but we were able to increase those emergency benefits last year just to keep up with the rising prices, so we hope that that was helpful to a lot of households. We're not sure if we'll be able to maintain that amount for next year but for this year, it was a big help to a lot of households to have that larger benefit for the utilities to be able to deliver that full commodity delivery of that fuel type.

So, we had planned to keep emergency opened through the whole summer. Again, we allocated \$90 million but the demand for that again, it was still really high. We did exhaust all those funds and we had to shut down on July 20th. So, we weren't able to operate for the whole summer. The goal of that was to be able to address utility emergencies for increased usage of cooling equipment in the summer but unfortunately, we ran out of those funds. So, definitely money well spent the full \$90 million. I think we're actually up to about \$96 million. Again, a lot of those are pending benefits though. So, in emergency, were there any questions or thoughts on that?

Andy Stone: Is there, I know Andrew you guys put quite an extensive database together. When you do the second and third emergencies, is there any way that you're tracking those by fuel and commodity or I mean, are you actually utilizing the database to its capacity to find out who the customers are that are utilizing the second and third emergencies more than anybody else? I mean, it's not just a curiosity, I mean when it comes down to it, when referrals get made to the weatherization program are those high energy burden folks being identified and are the highest emergencies, those 30,000 people that are in the second and third tier for emergencies, is data being looked at in a more complete way so that better referrals can be made to weatherization folks?

Emily Urban: Andrew you're muted.

Andrew Bryk: So, yeah, last year we did actually refer what we called high energy users, repeat customers over to NYSERDA in our referral process with them to enroll households that do outreach into the Empower Program. Could we do more drilling into the data? Yes, we could. I hope that we do, we're planning on continuing to do referrals in that nature. We're also planning on doing, I'm sure Ken's curious, additional referrals built on what we've done during the referrals of this EAP initiative. So, I think on both fronts, we're going to continue to push forward to be able to push access to the full suite of benefits that are funded through our programs and that were not done. So, yeah, we'll take any advice you have, anything that we can do. Once we can break the barrier, obviously it's about how do we get the referral? How do we make the right data? And maybe it's about forming a group to drill down to see what would be the data needed and how could we make sure those referrals are done? We're not doing as many referrals from a state level to weatherization as we are right now to NYSERDA. Although I know there's a lot of coordinated efforts that are happening between the subgrantee network and NYSERDA's Empower Program. The local districts do refer high energy users or others that are interested. That process, that process and some people who have gone online and done it that way

is still there, but I do believe, and I think I said this last year, and forgive me that we haven't pushed it more with our weatherization partners, we've been busy doing some other things on the weatherization side to do additional referrals. But I think we need to make that a little more robust.

Andy Stone: Well, I know that NYSERDA and HCR were kind of quasi working together on that list. I'm not sure exactly what the final determination was on it but the reason I ask is because we've got the bipartisan infrastructure law money is coming down the pike at us pretty quick here and it's a five-year program and it's a lot of money. It's going to double weatherization dollars for the next five-years so, I think it will be important if agencies have low wait list for their weatherization program, it's certainly going to be in everybody's best interest to identify as many of those HEAP, especially the emergency users plus we're talking about, on the PAC meeting yesterday we had a discussion about bifurcating funds to be able to ramp up the amount of money that goes into power client's housing as well as your HEAP housing. And I mean, if we do that and can replace a heating system as well as fully weatherize the unit, it would be nice to target those 30,000 folks out there that are still considered the highest energy burden.

Andrew Bryk: I heard that that was a good discussion. We just want to make sure that we're careful that we do it in line with HHS requirements and we're not just doing that which we're not permitted to do through DOE just, we still want to make sure that the measures are, whatever we're putting in are measurable and that it's not just, I will refrain on the thought of the word I really wanted to use. We can't replace those funds with those funds. They have to be used in conjunction with one another.

Andy Stone: Sure.

Andrew Bryk: Yeah, I look forward to that but its kind of a cool thing. During the last process, and I do want Emily to speak, and I told her I was not going to do this, we pushed for the extended and Emily if this is in your thing, shut me down right now. We pushed for weatherization to be able to extend the expenditure period. If you're shaking your head, I'm standing down and letting you take the floor. Okay. We pushed HHS because the original guidance under the American Rescue Plan Act was that funds had to be obligated and expended within a certain timeframe for the grant period. And it was really compressed. HHS pulled back on that strict guidance of this year being those funds on September 30th, 22 being obligated and expended, they let the states go back to their state rules which historically for our weatherization the state rule provides for that additional year for expenditures after the year of obligation at the household level. So, we pushed HHS to allow us to do that. So, I hope that flexibility has been a positive for you guys and those addendums are in process at OTDA. So, you guys will see that. you'll be able to do updates to the contracts. So, I'm sure your members will be quite...

Andy Stone: oh, it was a major sigh of relief Andrew, I can tell you that. So, we appreciate the fact that you guys made the effort to contact HHS and do that. And that will take care of ARPA. I mean, that will be a good thing. But the BIL money is certainly a substantial amount of money for the weatherization

program so, and it's five-years. We can weatherize a lot of people during that five-year period. So, anything that we can do to work with you folks, certainly would be beneficial to everybody. Especially if we can target these folks that are the highest users.

Kira Pospesel: And if I could just jump in on that cause I like Andy's idea and I know we spoke about data before. I think when you look at this more globally, those high users, I mean that's a symptom of something bigger and I think we have an opportunity here to embrace the issue. And if you can really back up and look at that data, a lot of times, if we're able to fix that fundamental issue, I can keep kids out of my child welfare programs and save those big costs and keep these families intact. But we need to embrace that issue and just not look at it as, we all kind of notice the canary in the cave, and the data is out there, but we're not reacting. And I think we need to embrace this population very differently because basically if you send them a letter, they're so overwhelmed with everything else that's happening, they're not going to read it, and basically, they could care less. And fixing the windows is not their biggest issue to deal with even though we know that that's technically going to help them. I think it's giving them the whole picture of what we actually can do, and we can deliver and how you deliver that message is really going to make the difference. But I think the data here is really the first step to take a look at. Now, you need to get everybody else to agree to that, but that's what I see from where I'm sitting.

Andy Stone: Oh, I agree completely Kira and for every dollar that those customers don't have to spend whether it's through with the weatherization process or through a HEAP benefit, it's a good breakfast that some child is going to have before they go to school during the day or its gas to get to work, whatever the expense and the stress on that low-income family is, combined HEAP efforts plus the utility benefit, plus weatherization, can make a real difference.

Andrew Bryk: And I'm going to double down, that's that stacking of those credits on that utility user's bill. It should be EAP. There should be a HEAP credit, there should be an EAP credit, and those households should also be automatically enrolled to a community seller to get an additional credit on their electric bill. I think those types of credits reflected on a bill make a \$200 bill that looks like something less is not to intimidating. And I think those are steps we need to look at how are we dealing with our population? How can we address it? Because it's not just about assistance, it's also about getting action and getting budgeting and getting other skill sets to be able to enforce self-sufficiency. And that \$100 bill that got changed to or a \$200 bill that changes to \$150 bill because it's back credits or some variation, some different amount might be a doable amount which doesn't reflect the deer in the headlight when it comes down to what am I paying at the end of the day? So, those are wonderful, as Emily said and Commissioner as you said, I heard Emily echoing in the back of my head, I always used to say build, you know, build the best onion and I'm hearing Emily say build that best parfait. How do we do that to serve our customers so that they're getting all of the wraparound support? And with that, I am throwing it back to Emily.

Andy Stone: You're muzzled Emily (laughing).

Emily Urban: Anything else for emergency before we go onto Heating Equipment? Okay. Alright so our furnace component, our Heating Equipment Repair Replacement is currently open. We are still operating that year-round. So, as of July 22nd, we are about 2,600 benefits. Last year we were about 2,900 benefits. So, we're down just a little bit but nothing too significant that we would really be alarmed about. So, again, operating that year-round October 21st, 2021, through September 30th, 2022. Our average replacement benefit is \$4,333.00 and our average repair is \$1,022.00. So, still kind of low averages but we are still getting, they've slowed down because of the summer months but all winter we were getting inquiry after inquiry saying those limits were just too low, it was \$6,500 for a replacement, \$3,000 for a repair and the vendors they all said the same thing. They just could not safely do some replacements, not all for that \$6,500 limit. You can tell by the average the \$4,333 that not every bid was coming in over that. They're still able to do some while under the \$6,500 cap but we really had to look at what that cap is, what the need is, especially downstate where a lot of the systems in the City are big boilers. All of those were going over the 65. So, we took a look at those maximum amounts. We have proposed larger maximums in our state plan. Once those go through or if those go through, once we get into the next program year on October 3rd, that's the following Monday, those will be at the higher maximum amount. So, hoping for a little bit less stress on the vendors this year to cover the difference of that. But, as far as covering the difference, we saw a lot of success with the weatherization programs assisting with that, assisting with the balance, especially Monroe County in particular so that every single time it was over 65, NYSEDA kicked in half. So, it was great, and they didn't have to make those choices of saying, well it's over the max, you can cover the rest or going to tons and tons of different vendors trying to get down to that max \$6,500. So, that took a lot of stress off the households and the districts, and also having to go to TA to cover the difference. So, it was a great coordination between the weatherization programs and the districts. With those higher maxes, we might still have to rely on that this year but hopefully it will be a little bit less, especially in the districts where that's just not an option with their weatherization programs.

Andy Stone: That's good to hear Emily. Can you tell us what the new proposed caps are?

Emily Urban: Can we Andrew?

Andy Stone: Can you tell me what the new proposed caps are going to be that are in the state plan?

Emily Urban: I'm looking at Andrew. You're muted, you're muzzled.

Andrew Bryk: I'm muzzled again. I was going to dance around that in a little while but yeah, there's a modest increase on both the repair and the replacement to be able to increase the benefit let's say maybe \$1,000, \$1,500 above the current caps.

Andy Stone: Okay. Equipment costs are just through the roof right now. I mean that's just because there's shortages and I'm glad you're actually making that happen.

Emily Urban: Yeah, its time, oh go ahead Andrew.

Andrew Bryk: You know who made the argument is the person sitting there smiling right now. And that's who made the argument on that with all the vendors, and we had a good conversation, and I can't say that I was the one who's willing to move it up and I said, "Sharpen the pencil" and Emily said, "That's not the case anymore, we need it." And I've heard it for so long, I think we had to do it and she made the argument and she had data to back it up so, kudos to her.

Emily Urban: And it's the districts as well. on the needs assessment calls, they expressed a real need for this and then the calls we were getting from vendors as well. So, I can't take any of the credit really for that just doing the math.

Andy Stone: Well, we're hearing across the board that the cost of doing business for weatherization or HVAC just borders on ridiculous right now. So, I would hate to have equipment shortages and increases because of supply chain end up being a negative impact for low-income folks. So, I applaud you guys making that change.

Emily Urban: Great, anything else for Heating Equipment Repair Replacement that is? So, for Heating Equipment Clean and Tune, again, also operating year-round. Once again, we allocate \$2 million to this benefit. As of July 22nd, we're about 5,000 benefits and this time last year, we were about 3,000 benefits. So, doesn't seem like a lot but it is very significant actually. That average benefit is \$265.00. So, historically, we have expended for the full program year about \$1 million. Oh good, we got a cheer over there. About \$1 million and we project we'll close about \$1.5 million. So, with only \$2 million allocated, that half a million dollars is making quite a bit of difference because these are very small benefits, so, we're able to serve so many households with just the \$2 million. A couple of years ago, I think it was in 2020 or 2021 I believe, we had appealed to the districts, and we said, "Here's the list. Once again, here's the list of the high users, the people who got those three emergencies" and we said, "Reach out to these households, they may just have inefficient furnaces." We gave them lists of people that had their furnaces repaired or replaced. We said, "Outreach to these households, let them know that this benefit is available." I think we saw kind of a modest uptick that year, and I'm pretty sure that outreach has continued because we are seeing steady increase in Clean and Tune every year. So, the word is getting out and it is a very useful benefit for a very low cost. So, we continue to push that out. The \$5,000 we consider that success for this year. Anything on Clean and Tune?

Andrew Bryk: I will plug something in. Do you have new publications for outreach that people might be interested in?

Emily Urban: It's the same flyer that we made about two years ago. I can send the link out to the group. You can order them directly from OTDA. It's a great front and back color flyer English on the frontside,

Spanish on the reverse and its just no cost Clean and Tune to the point. If you want this benefit, apply with your district. Okay.

So, cooling. That was a hot topic this year and continues to be a hot topic. So, we operated cooling from May 2nd, 2022, we operated that for 10 weeks and we closed a couple of weeks ago on July 8th, 2022. That average benefit was \$740.00 which is very close to our max of \$800.00 per benefit. Again, higher costs of equipment, especially in portable units, leave units, those costs were significantly higher this year, so that was reflected in that average benefit. We're looking to land about 30,000 cooling benefits. A lot of those are still pending right now as the districts are finishing up those, a lot of them aren't pending applications at this point, we're waiting for installation, we're waiting for final bills to come back, confirming with the household that everything is all good. We can't make those payments until all of that is complete. So, I think we're about 12,000 benefits paid right now but I assume the number of actual units installed right now is well above that. We're just waiting for invoices and payments to go through right now. So, 30,000 benefits as of July 22nd, 9,000 benefits last year total for the whole summer. So, it's crazy. We did so much more this year. We ran for 17 weeks last year, we expended \$8.5 million for 9,000 benefits. This year 30,000 benefits \$23 million in 10 weeks. So, a great success on that program and the reason for that is because we were able to remove the medical requirement so, previously a household would have to have a vulnerable household member or excuse me, a household member with a medical condition exacerbated by heat. We were able to remove that this year. We had additional funding, so if you were eligible for regular benefit, you are most likely eligible for a cooling benefit. So, really opened up the flood gates for a lot of people to become eligible for this benefit. And that was reflected in the huge increase in applications. New York City also offered an online application for cooling. This is the first time they've ever offered an online application for any HEAP benefit. So, again, just opening it up to households that were previously unable to apply, maybe they couldn't mail in the application or go to the district to apply. So, by having that online application for New York City, once again expanded access to this benefit. So, coupling that with the expanded eligibility, those benefits just went extremely fast.

Andy Stone: Emily, I'm guessing you didn't anticipate 30,000 units being installed this past year.

Emily Urban: Oh, we did, yeah, no, I mean we knew we were going to spend it all. I mean we didn't anticipate 30,000 because our funding was originally only \$15 million, and I think we estimated we could do about 18,000 benefits with that. We were able to increase that funding in mid-June to \$23 million. We were able to move funding around from weatherization into cooling. So, once we moved that funding over, yeah, we fully expected to spend it and to spend it really quickly.

Andy Stone: Was it enough? I mean it's only it's July 8th you closed out.

Emily Urban: It's what we could afford. So, yeah, I mean tough decisions sometimes have to be made as far as funding goes. We were able to help a lot of households. We weren't able to help every

household unfortunately. But I do think we were able to help a lot of those. Again, they may not be helped yet, but if they have that pending application in and if the application was in before July 8th, they can still be considered for that cooling benefit.

Andy Stone: So, do you anticipate next year doing something similar? Obviously, you're going to keep the medical requirement out of the program again next year.

Emily Urban: So, with us going back to a normal funding amount, we're not sure if we will be able to maintain that for next year. We'll most likely be back down to our usual 8 or \$15 million for cooling like we have been historically when we only get the typical block grant funding. So, as you know cooling did change midstream this year, as it got closer to the spring so, what cooling will look like in a year from now, is yet to be seen, I guess.

Andy Stone: Does that mean you're going to have to put restrictions back on it so that you can target those folks who need it the most or are you planning on permanently removing the medical requirement?

Emily Urban: Andrew you just unmuted, did you want to, I can take it.

Andrew Bryk: No, go right ahead, take it away.

Emily Urban: Yeah, we might have to put that restriction back on. We're going to be looking at how much funding we have left after this winter and then we'll see what we are realistically able to provide for next year. If we have to go back to limiting it to people with a medical necessity, because we, of course, wouldn't want to have less funding to put forth through this and then households that do actually have a medical condition have them miss out on it...

Andy Stone: exactly

Emily Urban: because we have expanded it to everybody. So, we want to make sure that at least those households are prioritized in some way.

Andy Stone: I completely agree. I mean that makes a lot of sense to do that and the medical restriction is actually, it works in your favor because now you're automatically able to target those folks who need it the most so.

Emily Urban: Exactly. Yeah, so our benefits, we allow our cooling benefits allow for an air conditioner or a fan, that's just what our benefit has always been. We don't have any benefits that go directly to the

household or to the utility. We would love to have a benefit like that. If we receive more funding and cooling is really a hot topic, this extreme heat, everybody's talking about it, Washington is talking about it, so if there is a funding stream specific for cooling, we would love to expand cooling even beyond what we were able to do this year. But, again, with funding being uncertain, we do have to plan a more conservative program and then see what is available. So, it's a full year from now and who knows what will be the case at that point. That's all I have for cooling. Was there anything else to add? Okay.

Ken Gossel: Great job and all that work. A lot of benefitted, so thank you.

Emily Urban: Yeah, thank you. So, that's all I have for the program updates. Andrew did you want to talk about the state plan?

Andrew Bryk: Oh sure, I'm going to start reading the draft, did everybody get a copy?

Emily Urban: You're joking.

Andrew Bryk: Okay, dead air, crickets, crickets. Okay, give me one second to pull up that. So, what I'm really going to start with is an appropriations update from Washington. If you have, haven't, I'm just going to throw it out there, I'm going to speak like you may or may not know. President's proposed budget that came out in March increased funding for HEAP about \$175 million nationally from \$3.8 billion to \$3.975 billion. The President's proposed budget allowed for a carve out of up to 2.7% of the LIHEAP funding for the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program. Okay that's what that is. Nothing's happened. That's what the President proposed. HEAP also, under the Infrastructure Bill for the next five-years will receive funds under the \$100 million that was passed last fall. We received a little over \$6 million this year and will for the next four going out. So, that's an awesome thing. July, first the House budget came out. It raised it to \$4 billion so it's good. It's a little bit of increase, not enough to really mess with the funding formula, but the House bill did put in a provision to look at the funding distribution formula. There wasn't a lot of detail, and it has to get worked out in Joint Committee. But there is something there which, generally when they start talking funding formulas, its not so beneficial to the states that have historically benefited as heating states when the program was originally established over 40 years ago. And then the Senate bill came out which was very similar to the House bill at 4 billion. Sorry, I take that back, it was the Senate bill, the House bill was fine 4 billion. Senate bill came out that is where they proposed a modification that has to go back to Joint Committee between the House and the Senate committees about the hold harmless provision that was in the funding formula. That's just, as I was saying, is a huge a discussion. That is really important to us. We saw the percentage of funding which we normally get between 10 and 11% of the federal appropriation dwindle under the CARES Act which was really a combination of new and old funding formulas. Our percentage went to less than 5% and that really hurt us during that funding stream. That said, glad to get it, but when the funding formula gets addressed, it does not generally benefit heating states. That said, that's where I'm going, and I'll stop there because you know I have to walk that fine line.

There was the Inflation Reduction Act that went out this week or last week, sorry late last week. There was no new money in it for either LIHEAP or LIWAP and that's really the curious thing about both the House and the Senate proposed budgets at zero for LIWAP. So, the only proposed budget that keeps LIWAP going is the President's proposed budget. In the Infrastructure Bill that came out last week, nothing for HEAP, nothing for LIWAP, \$313 million for weatherization. So, at least there was something in it for us in addition to what was already pushed out for weatherization. I think October is going to be the big wild card for us. Emily spoke to cooling a little while ago. There has been so much discussion. I won't say that two Saturdays ago I took a call sitting outside from HHS on a Saturday afternoon regarding cooling. And it was from Dr. Lanique Howard and it's a topic and the White House is talking about it, people on the hill are talking about it. So, I don't know in October if we're going to get an omnibus budget or a continuing resolution. Continuing resolution keeps us at steady level funding. It would be the last funding stream that was appropriated. So, that would keep our allocation somewhere in that \$380 million range. If it goes up at the \$4 billion range being, I would dare say we could be at the \$400 million range. Even if we are, it barely keeps pace with inflation. It does nothing to address cooling and that is really, Andy you brought up the cooling equipment. I love the cooling equipment you know it was near and dear to my heart. As we pushed it out and pushed it out and we've changed it, modified it, it's great. We can get air conditioners out there. It's a little, you know, could the benefits be better used or if HEAP at the national level received additional funding that would support states in putting out a bill assistance benefit for cooling, I hope that is and I know it is part of the dialogue. But I hope all of our elected officials are talking that. And the positive thing is what I can say, you've all heard me say it before, really neat thing it's an election year. And people are talking. And everybody has everyone's ear. And you know it's not that we can do everything for everyone, but as extreme weather events increase, I think we would be foolish to say that we need in New York to start looking, if we didn't already. We've started, we started rowing the boat with the cooling equipment. We need to push harder for a bill assistance component to complement that because otherwise putting equipment in is great but increasing people's energy load and not being able to keep pace with increased costs in inflation due to the funding for the program being stagnate, I hope we're all on the top of the hill on our soapbox saying the funding needs to be there. There's a trickle effect. It's not just heating anymore. We have bigger things to look at. So, with that, I'm going to get off my soapbox and I do want to talk about the state plan for a little bit because I would be remiss and derelict not to do that through the Block Grant.

So, Emily gave you some snippets. I can't give you concrete; it's not been approved yet. There is a draft plan, it is in internal clearance. We hope to have it out for public consumption in the next two weeks. We plan to have public hearings in the next three weeks and get the plan to Washington by September 1st. It has been a tough year; I'm not even going to mince any words. We're a little behind where I would like to be right now. That said, we are all rowing, everything is in place, so I want to give everyone a little taste. The best way I can say it is we have to put horses in the barn this year, if our funding goes back from the pandemic plus base funding that we've had for the last two years to just base funding for this year. And it's a really scary place to be especially as I know our households, I know Emily spoke to benefits and 1.4 to 1.7, there's always a reduction 1.4 equates to a 1.2 1.3 so I can only say we know what 1.7 is going to look like. We have more households we're going to serve. We have

less money than we had last year to serve those same households. We have increased costs. The cost for commodity across the board has gone up. Distillates are off the charts that I haven't seen since we put the oil buying component into place in 2004. The jump we saw in 2009 and then once again now, it is insane to think of 150 gallon fill up for fuel oil being a \$900 bill. That said, we are putting forth modest increases on gas and electric to address the increased costs for the regular benefit. It serves the largest number of populations we serve out of any component, and it will get a modest benefit increase out to the majority of our households. Most of our regular benefit households receive tier 1 benefits. The vulnerables goes back and forth. We are proposing to keep the add-ons at the same amount as last year 35 and 41 so you get the \$76 add-on. Deliverables we're making a little more radical adjustment that looks more like what we did for our emergency benefit increase last year when we increased it from 675 over \$900. We're not going to what the emergency was last year, we had to ration it back. I think I've just given you where you can think that number will be. We need to buy a minimum delivery period. It's a scary place for us to be. Wood – we are putting forth a modest increase because our wood vendors get hit twice, gas, oil, grease they have to go out, they have to cut what they deliver that wood. They also faced huge increases in cost. So, we had to put forth an increase that was very similar to what we proposed and implemented for last year's emergency component and just dialed it back a little bit just because that was what we could afford.

The renter's benefits – we are not proposing any modifications to the tier 1 or tier 2 renters, or heat included with rent benefit. We will continue with the heat need benefit to maximize the food stamp budgets of households, their standard utility allowance. Emergency, we are proposing a decrease. Last year we had to increase it, we knew after RAS expired, we didn't know what it looked like. We had a huge demand. This year our funding and being able to increase the regular for a larger pool of candidates, we are proposing to reduce the emergency allocation modestly. I can't say where it's going to be at the end of the day. It's still in clearance. That said, we did modestly reduce the emergency benefits from the level that we increased them to last spring you know mid-way, but we did pull them back modestly because what we originally saw, it didn't come to fruition. So, it went up. We saw the projected, we increased our benefits on those projections, they didn't come to fruition as high as they did but the bottom line is we're still back, oil prices are going up, electric is up, gas is up, everything's trickling down but on the emergency side we're going to not be able to have as many benefits as we had last year and the benefit amounts will be modestly smaller but yet high enough to purchase at least 30 days prospected service for a minimum delivery. Commissioner don't boo me please; we are proposing a later opening. The districts spoke overwhelmingly that they wanted a slightly later opening, potentially a month or so from what we did last year.

Kira Pospesel: So, I'll just question you. Frontline staff will always tell you that but when you look at the reality, we are getting phone calls on a daily basis for people who need these dollars and you're going to get all those applications stuck in the queue and you're going to be calling me that I can't get the work done and I'm telling you, the earlier you open the better and sooner and better quality of work we're going to get done. So, when you listen to people who do the work daily, it doesn't work. I see that every single day. So, I'm going to say my piece and when we have this meeting in November, I'm going

to be calm as a cucumber because I told you its coming. And this HEAP season is actually frightening me.

Andrew Bryk: You and I both. I share that.

Kira Pospesel: So, don't tell me you're pushing it to November?

Andrew Bryk: I will be very honest with you, it's a combination not so much being able to on the comments received, it was more reality of increased caseload, both temporary assistance, SNAP, increased caseload that was served last year with HEAP, there is a potential for the households that were served through the Emergency Rental Assistance Program that traditionally didn't receive HEAP, those households may be potentially coming in this year. And with increased regular benefits and looking at the possibility of a program that has a base funding of \$380 million, it scares me tremendously. So, all of us should be lobbying to whatever degree we can that our federal partners fund this program at a level that is sufficient to meet the needs of New Yorkers. And I am pushing it because not only does HEAP benefit, but our partners in weatherization also benefit and their funding will go up and they will be able to serve additional households. So, it's all the boats ride.

Going back to the plan – so, you will see it's pretty much about the same for emergency, just slightly a little less, a little bit of belt tightening just to be able to get from January 3rd out to March 15th. And that is the reality of the potential program funded at that level. We are proposing to maintain our funding for Heating Equipment Repair Replacement with increases to the benefit levels for both repairs and replacements. We are going to maintain the Clean and Tune budget at its current level. That said, we are proposing a modest increase to the Clean and Tune benefit to ensure that all of those furnaces can get a Clean and Tune and we have seen a little bit of an increase and we've got a lot of requests for peripheral. We need, you know sorry, I was going to say flux capacitor, we need an igniter. We need a low water cut off. There's an additional part that's needed to be able to have that unit function properly in addition to having a Clean and Tune. So, we are proposing a small increase there. Cooling, it's you know it's a belt tightening year. On cooling, we saw the expansion, the demand was off the charts, and it ended up having a ripple effect on our vendors being able to install things timely and being able to do so prior to the heating season. So, we're looking at that policy. Hopefully, the dialogue in Washington and the funding for the program permits us to do some more creative things next year. That said, right off the rip, we know we do need to increase the cost for certain pieces of equipment, particularly sleeve units which just the unit itself cost upward \$800 and we've seen them go higher than that. So, in an effort to make sure that we're able to still do those type of units, we want to be able to increase that cost the allowable benefit there.

You've got as deep as I can get without giving you a paper document. Does anybody have any questions? I apologize that you do not have a document in front of you. I've said it to you for many years, and this year I did not do it again. So, I apologize to all of you, it was not for lack of trying. I'll say

it, it came down to budgets and figuring out exactly what we had, what we had spent, what had to go out the door for ARPA, base funding, and cleaning out all of the additional funding from prior years. It was a heck of a task. Emily, I just can't thank you enough for the role that you've played making sure that this program was administered properly this year. So, thank you. I turn it back over to you.

Emily Urban: I was triple muted. So, referrals and coordination. Andrew did you actually want to take that as well? It's the last item on our agenda.

Andrew Byrk: Alright. Referral and Coordination. Do we want to go there today? I'll throw it to the group.

Kira Pospesel: Well, I would say Andrew, the group is really small so it may behoove you to wait so you have more people in your presentation unless there's something pressing that you need our input on.

Andrew Bryk: Well, I think this really was a jump off of the referral list for Clean and Tunes from last year and also being able to do additional referrals out to the weatherization network. So, it was kind of a two for kind of thing that we had discussed, and we wanted to make sure it made it back onto the agenda. If we want to put a pin in it, or if we want to start the conversation, I'm open to whatever anybody wants to do. Andy did you freeze on us?

Andy Stone: No, I'm here. I'm just pondering Andrew. We don't expect that the BIL money, the state plan is due October 1st, and we don't expect to go to contract on the infrastructure money. Hoping, I'm pushing for them to get that money up and running by 4/1 of next year. Dan decided, as you know from the PAC meeting yesterday, he decided to extend the weatherization grant and the state is hoping to align themselves with the better federal cutoff date so they're looking to go to June 30th. So, everybody needs to extend their weatherization grants by 3 months this year. As I said earlier, the infrastructure money is going to almost double the amount of money that we've got coming in the weatherization program, so certainly the issue of referrals is going to need to come up. It doesn't necessarily have to happen today. We've got a little bit of time that we can talk about it but it's something that we really should, you know the districts should be making referrals whether its OFA and DSS as often as possible. I don't have a good bead on where weatherization wait lists are right now. That is something I probably should dig into because it's going to become obviously a more and more important issue. You can't weatherize homes if you don't have lists of folks to weatherize. So, it's something that obviously does have to come up.

Andrew Bryk: Is there, and I should know this, what outreach or what materials does weatherization have? Is there anything that we could share with our network on behalf of that work to get some outreach or materials or I'm thinking of your website Emily, is there anything we can do to link out so that we can get more traffic going that way?

Andy Stone: Yeah, our website doesn't really have anything per se regarding that, but HCR's does. It's been a while since they developed and put out material. It may not be an inappropriate request of them. Let me look into that. You know especially with; we've got a little bit of time before the HEAP season starts but let me look into that a little bit because we haven't really done an outreach blitz on weatherization for quite some time. Quite honestly, I'm not even sure what's on HCR's website. I know you can gain access to an application there but as far as handouts, pamphlets, that type of thing, the state hasn't produced anything in quite some time. I'll look into that.

Andrew Bryk: Commissioner, does your local community action reach out to you? Are you in working with...?

Kira Pospesel: yeah, they have staffing problems, so I think that they've had issues hiring people. I don't know where they are right now to be honest with you, but that was my last conversation with her.

Andy Stone: Yeah, that's across the board, Kira. Everybody's having trouble hiring right now. We're hoping with the infrastructure money, and I don't want to get off topic, but I mean we've been with continued resolutions we've been stuck at the same funding rate since _____ closed which was 10 years ago. We haven't even seen an inflationary increase and that's one of the contributing factors to the high turnover and lack of staff in weatherization program right now. And we're hoping with the infrastructure money that the cap agency boards will get on board with increases and recognizing weatherization folks as a trade, so that we can get weatherization staff rates up to a point where we can keep and maintain staff. That's a big issue for us Kira right now.

Andrew Bryk: Okay, so there's something good there. So, we had an initial let's keep a pin on the agenda so that we keep that, and I do want to, before we jump off, I want to point it back, is it worth to try to put out lists again this year? Commissioner what would you suggest? I know we were talking about that prior.

Kira Pospesel: Absolutely. I mean, hey I mean just like a little starfish story. You know maybe everybody isn't going to take you up on it but that one is really important to the one. So, I think every time we can try to do something here. I mean whatever I can do to keep people stable in their house. I have no housing left in Greene at all, there is nothing left. So, these people are potentially going to be homeless and if these bills are not paid, it's going to push them to be homeless a lot sooner. So, whatever we can do to help out.

Andrew Bryk: How would you feel if we asked the districts to do that again? I think that was our pressure point last year. Should we pursue essentially something from the state level to send out letters to households promoting this?

Kira Pospesel: The state letter would be great because like you guys, you guys are hiring thousands and thousands of staff and unfortunately, you're taking my staff, so you know I think that's only fair then that you guys send out the letters.

Andrew Bryk: Em that's something we can try to explore.

Emily Urban: Yeah, I wrote that down.

Kira Pospesel: Thank you.

Andrew Bryk: With that, I send it off to all of you. Is there anything else that anyone would like to discuss during the, I think we have an open discussion now?

Ken Gossel: Open discussion, sure.

Emily Urban: Commissioner, just to go off what you said about very few people being on the call today, I will speak for Vivvy Williams, if anybody knows anybody who should be nominated to joint the Block Grant, fill some vacancies, send them Vivvy's way, Vivvy can provide the information about becoming a member of the Block Grant. Getting that nomination in and filling out some of the vacancies we have here so we fill up these squares.

Kira Pospesel: I'm just surprised we don't have a lot of people because we're actually a lot of fun.

Emily Urban: I had fun.

Kira Pospesel: And Emily, I think you've done a great job.

Emily Urban: Thank you.

Andrew Bryk: I do have a couple of thoughts on that. I have a couple of people that I've discussed maybe in authority or another state agency that are playing in our space that maybe somebody could reach out to Andy and shake the bushes maybe on an authority or another state agency that you work with that might be good candidates for membership to the Block Grant.

Andy Stone: I already have somebody in mind, Andrew.

Andrew Bryk: Thank you. And then Commissioner I will always appeal to you, if there's anybody that you would suggest you and Paul have been amazing and you've carried this for the rest of the state. If there are any other Commissioners or districts that you feel that would be, whether they agree with us or not, I think you know I think we need everybody at the table to make us on our game and do our best game.

Kira Pospesel: Yep, I've certainly asked that and I'm trying but you know our world is rather difficult at this moment so, people are very reluctant to volunteer for any additional tasks. So, that seems to be the issue. I think maybe if we continue more in the WebEx area, that may be a different conversation to have. So, we'll have to see as the fall approaches here.

Andrew Bryk: Emily is that a discussion? Are we, you know, I think this meeting we are vacillating on in person or WebEx and where is the Block Grant? Is this the best way of doing this? You know I love to see you guys in person, unfortunately I haven't been very good at that or unable to do that, but I think this forum really seems to facilitate a great conversation.

Kira Pospesel: Except I do miss seeing your advertising for your soda cup or whatever you used to have at the table.

Andrew Bryk: I was looking for it. I won't tell you; I have cold brew coconut water.

Kira Pospesel: Boring, boring.

Andrew Bryk: Sorry, I digress.

Emily Urban: I've had this conversation with Vivvy as well putting this on a virtual platform going forward. We like to have your input as well if we ever want to go back to in person or if we want to keep doing this. I agree it might entice more people to join.

Andy Stone: We could actually do both. We can at least meet in person once a year or something like that.

Ken Gossel: Yeah, that might be a good cap on this.

Andrew Bryk: Maybe we say the November one or either this one or the November one we should propose should be in person. I think those are two of the most critical times for us, especially as we launched the program, or we're launching the program but as we get into the winter, cause that's the

wild card, we never know what we're going to get until we get to the cold weather. I'm open to anything. Okay. Vice Chair.

Ken Gossel: So, any other new business? Seeing none, I'll accept a motion to adjourn.

Kira Pospesel: And I'll make that motion for you.

Ken Gossel: And a second?

Andy Stone: I'll second, Ken.

Ken Gossel: All in favor?

All: Aye.

Ken Gossel: Any opposed? There being none, the official business of the Block Grant Advisory Council is concluded for today. we look forward to seeing you, if I didn't mention it on November 3rd, Thursday and we'll determine whether that's going to be in person or via WebEx in the next couple of months.