

HEAP Block Grant Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

Thursday, November 4, 2021

A meeting of the Block Grant Advisory Council was held via WebEx on Thursday, November 4th, 2021. The meeting began at 1:00 pm.

Attendees

Andrew Bryk, NYS OTDA HEAP

Andy Stone, Executive Director, NYS Weatherization Directors Association

Anna Vitolins: NYS OTDA HEAP and LIHWAP

Helen Schneider, NYS OTDA HEAP

Kenneth Gossel, National Fuel Gas

Keri Stark, NYS OTDA HEAP

Kira Pospesal, Commissioner, Greene County Social Services

Millie Rosas, NYS HEAP

Vivvy Williams, BGAC secretary

Discussion

Helen Schneider: Good afternoon everybody, this is Helen Schneider I'm the WebEx host for this meeting and welcome to the Home Energy Assistance Program Block Grant Advisory Council meeting for today, Thursday, November 4, 2021. So, if you have any problems seeing this, please let us know at the HEAP bureau and I hope everybody can see the agenda. If you can't let me know and with that, I'll turn the meeting over to Ken Gossel who is going to be our leader for today. Thank you.

Ken Gossel: Thank you all for joining. Really a great time to be having this discussion. A lot going on at OTDA both within HEAP and elsewhere with a bunch of assistance that is being doled out as we speak and really this is wonderful to see. So, I was just going to start the meeting by just doing a roll call if each of the individuals could identify themselves quickly and their organizations, please?

Andy Stone: Andy Stone I'm with the New York State Weatherization Director's Association. Hi Ken, how are you?

Ken Gossel: Hi Andy, great thank you.

Kira Pospel: I'm Kira Pospel Commissioner Department of Social Services in Green

Millie Rosas: I'm Millie Rosas, New York State HEAP. Can everybody hear me?

Ken Gossel: Yes Millie, thank you.

Andrew Bryk: Andrew Bryk New York State Office of Temporary Disability Assistance the Home Energy Assistance Program Bureau and I'll throw LIHWAP on the end of that for Low Income Water Assistance Program.

Vivvy Williams: Vivvy Williams, BGAC Secretary for HEAP Bureau.

Anna Vitolins: Anna Vitolins, New York State HEAP and LIHWAP.

Ken Gossel: And Sue Montgomery-Corey were you able to join is via phone? She may not as of yet, but she is expected to join. Well thank you all and welcome to today's conference or discussion here. I appreciate you attending. First order of business, I was going to ask if everybody had an opportunity to review the minutes from the last quarterly meeting and if so, are there any changes or amendments to the minutes.

Kira Pospel: Since I hear no changes can I offer you a motion to approve.

Ken Gossel: Please, thank you. Any seconds to that motion?

Andy Stone: I'll second Ken.

Ken Gossel: Okay all in favor?

All: Aye.

Ken Gossel: Any opposed? Motion carries. Thank you. So, we're going to turn it over to Andrew Bryk to start the discussion today I believe 2021, 2022 HEAP in review, Andrew you want to kick it off please?

Andrew Bryk: Okay I apologize. I don't have, I do not have those notes I will get to those. Ken can we...

Ken Gossel: Andrew take it away you can go in any order you want, what you miss, which probably will be nothing, I'll catch.

Andrew Bryk: Okay, I can even without notes that I normally have them I just don't know exactly where they are. I can jump into 2021. It's wrapped up at this point. We finally closed it. I thank all the Commissioners, and everybody can say thank you. We finally closed it, but I'll be very honest, we pushed the program, we pushed the districts, we pushed the systems whether it be

keeping the benefit open longer that was both the regular and the emergency component in addition to offering three emergency benefits. We did a ton of outreach. We did outreach for cooling. We did outreach for Clean and Tune and I say we, and this is the local districts, the local certification networks, and all of our vendor partners. We kept the program through the end of August which really pushed our systems and everyone throughout the summer doing cooling, heating equipment repair replacement, clean and tunes and then as we were looking forward into the 21/22 program early outreach and all of these things were happening all at the same time and I just have to say it was a magnificent effort by everyone, both at the state, the local, our vendor partners, it was a huge undertaking to get to where we are. I will come back and I'm sure I'm going to get an e-mail any second with my note that I can't find in front of me. So, we'll get back to that as far as the defining data so I can give you some numbers where we settled out.

Right now, the households served for the 20/21 is in production. HHS just sent out last week the action transmittal instructing the grantees providing us with the information about the report and the directive to get the report in. So, the report is being finalized based off of the Business Requirement Rules and the data requirements for this year. We'll get that done and I'll have it next time we meet. I will have concrete information as far as the number of households that were served for the 20/21 program year and to build on that the performance measures data. Right now, is the timeframe where the vendor files have already been sent out to all of the public service commission regulated authorities, the additional new municipal utilities that have been involved into the program this year for performance measures and all of the oil, kerosene and propane vendors that have been pulled into performance measures. We have built that pool. We are over 45 vendors right now that we are collecting consumption data for. I think some of the things that we put into place this year possibly as a result LIWAP the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program we will have some additional insights and flexibilities and put some things in place. And I'll have additional data. So, I'd like the parking lot that if I could for this right this second and I would love to jump into 21/22 because 21/22 is really a build off of 20/21. When we did the state plan the state was provided the option of updating the FFY 21 plan to cover the FFY 22 program year. And that is exactly what we did. We took last year's program we updated it with the program based the benefit, the breakdown of the funds allocated to each component. We brought the program dates back to where we originally start with always back to March 15th, Heating Equipment Repair Replacement across 12 months, cooling 12 months, cooling sat where it has been for the last few years in May. The funding for this program included funding from the American Rescue Plan, excuse me the American Rescue Plan Act. That's the primary driver of the FFY 22 program year and the spending plan. It was \$535 million in funding. Those funds are available for obligation both for FFY 21 and FFY 22. They have to be obligated by September 30 of 22. They must be expended by December 30 of 22 which is a little different than our base funding. Does anyone have any questions so far? And I apologize.

Ken Gossel: No, thank you. Keep going. Part of maybe funding you could address either what's been carried over or what is already in place for 21/22 thank you.

Andrew Bryk: Thank you Ken.

Millie: This is Millie, can you just repeat the funding again?

Andrew Bryk: Sure. So as of right now, for FFY 22 HHS you know the Federal appropriation that HHS is administering the national appropriation is \$3.37 billion. So, we generally get about you know approximately 10% so that you know that would \$337 million but it's a little higher so if we went off last year about 373 ish is what we expect. I can tell you definitively as of last week, New York State received 90% of its final allocation that's why I can tell you that number. We received \$340 million in base funding available for federal fiscal year FFY 2022. That combined with the remaining funds available through the American Rescue Plan will be available for this program year. I cannot tell you as of today exactly what's left of the American Rescue Plan dollars. I can tell you where they've been allocated. Why I can't say that is because there's funds and obligation expenditure that are obligated guaranteed and haven't been disbursed yet. We provided 10% of the American Rescue Plan fund to Housing and Community Renewal for weatherization. We worked with them to expand the work scope for those funds that will be allocated specifically the \$53.5 million. It will expand the weatherization capabilities to beyond what they are currently doing and provide some flexibilities as we prepare for electrification and as we move in trying to align with the State's Clean Energy bills. We did the same thing with 5% of the funds that went to NYSERDA, the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority and on their side, it was especially to promote air source heat pumps and move towards the clean energy bills the State has set forth. Additionally, we provided administrative dollars to 10% of the funds set aside for administrative funds. Those funds are split between the state and the local government in an 80/20% allocation. The State funds are split between OTDA, HCR, and the New York State Office for the Aging. Those administrative funds were released to the local districts and a directive has been sent out. There will be a forthcoming program allocation. Those funds are in clearance right now. We got out in front of them this year so that renter's benefits and locally issued benefits can be issued as early as possible. I expect those to be released shortly. With the new funds that we just received; we will also do a new administrative allocation for FFY 22 out of the \$340 million that we received last week. Does that slice it up pretty well for you Millie?

Millie: Yes, thank you Andrew.

Andy Stone: Andrew can you give me data on the negotiations with HCR and where the ARPA funds stand with them?

Andrew Bryk: They are in the final push. I have Keri Stark on the line with me, Keri would you like to address that today?

Keri Stark: Hi, yep, this is Keri Stark. We are working on updating an MOU between OTDA and HCR to allow us to provide those funds to HCR that's still being worked on so as soon as it's ready we'll get it into clearance and get it approved, signed, and executed.

Andy Stone: Keri or Andrew is there I mean the ARPA money has been hanging around for a while, is there anything that we can do to assist potentially getting the MOU settled and getting contracts out to folks?

Andrew Bryk: We're in good position to get it finalized. There was a little bit of, for HCR to be able to get this in place, they changed the way they are allocating the funds once they are received. And they are bringing their Housing Trust Corp into this. So, it changed the dynamic of the MOU and we just had to navigate through the complexities of that. We're in good shape. As far as the work scope stuff, we are in really good shape and I think that will happen very quickly. Keri is finalizing that end of the paper and working with our Divisional Legal Affairs. So, I expect that to be done as quickly as possible. There are some restrictions on the flexibility with those funds and we do realize that, and we've been very sensitive with our partner agency to make sure that we're working as expeditiously to try to get this done and Samantha Pierce and myself are in contact and we're working through it. We want to get these funds out. Andy I'll tell you and if she hasn't told you the same thing, I'm her biggest cheerleader, I love the renewed energy that she has brought to HCR in weatherization and looking at it in a real scientific way and I know that you're working intimately with them and this is going to be a really, really great thing. So, we are moving, and it is a priority for our agency to make sure that that gets done as well as the funding for NYSERDA. Sometimes it just takes a little while to get everything done. The funding was signed into law back March of 2021 and then the funding was released subsequently. Yeah, I hear you we're working to get there. If it was just a clean, no changing of work scopes or modifications and making sure that all the I's were dotted and the T's were crossed it would have been a quicker process. Those changes that were put into place as a result of some really creative thinking and then on the other side with the air source heat pumps out of necessity, because other funding was being exhausted that was allocated from rate payer funds. And we really do want to push this move as we've provided additional referrals over to NYSERDA, as you know, there's a common thing between weatherization and power. So many of those jobs will then go to weatherization providers across the state. So, we've kind of frontloaded this in an effort to make sure that we're getting things in place and we will continue to support both agencies in doing whatever we can do to get this across the finish line.

Andy Stone: Okay thank you both. The clock's ticking Andrew. My network is waiting so let's light a fire under this thing. Thank you both, I appreciate it.

Andrew Bryk: And I'm sure not speaking for Keri but she would be happy to get this done too because Keri is another staff member who is now jumping into water to support the water effort with Anna and Helen. We can speak to that in a little bit.

Ken Gossel: Thanks Andrew. Next on the agenda for this year the dates of operation and the components maybe you can hit those together for us please?

Andrew Bryk: Definitely. Thank you for all your input. The regular benefit opened on October 1st, 2021. As I said, there was a quick turnaround. We did have early outreach. There was a shortened early outreach as far as the districts were concerned. It was not a shortened early

outreach for our applicants, we were still able to get those applications out and into their hands, and they were able to be returned prior to the program opening. Sorry for stacking the districts on the frontend. So, we stacked them with some paper as opposed to people in the waiting room. So, it was a balance and I think at the end of the day, its working out well and I look forward to that part of this discussion. So far, I can tell you 500,000 benefits are authorized and they're out the door. Many of them have been guaranteed over 100 and as of this morning I saw 2 files, the first 2 files that went out for FFY 22 were in excess of \$130 million so that is an amazing thing. Those funds for benefits are on the street and the big push was to make sure that we got deliverable fuel benefits out on the street first. So, the average benefit, as it stands right now, is \$492, the component is slated to close in the plan as of today March 15th, 2021. The emergency benefit component will open January 2nd, 2022 which is also the last day of the holiday moratorium covered under HEFPA. During which the mandated moratorium and the additional 180 days that was granted will expire but I don't think we're in bad shape, but I don't know what I don't know so I can't say that definitively. What I can say is that we're positioned. We are looking right now knowing what we do know is that there's increased fuel pricing and there will be less buying power with the HEAP dollar and households, their bills will go up this year. So, we are looking at and we are looking out to see what is available based off of the spending plan that we put forth to see if there is flexibility on our emergency benefit amounts to address what potentially could be higher bills in the coming season. The Heating Equipment Repair Replacement component opened on October 1st and will operate until September 30th, 2022 or until the funding available is expended. The Clean and Tune benefit opened on October 1st, 2021 and will operate through September 30th, 2022. We've done 12 furnaces since the beginning of October and I apologize the day that I'm looking at is 1 week old so I know there are additional benefits that have been authorized but there's only 12 statewide so far but we have done 23 Clean and Tunes during the first 3 weeks of October. The average benefit for replacement so far is \$3,331, the average repair is \$1,044. I'm assuming that average in those 12 are only because Millie, I'm not putting you on the spot, but New York City hasn't reported their furnaces yet. So, I'm assuming once they do that average is going to go back up. Because that was a serious thing for last year which I knew we had supply chain both on the material and labor side so we did end up last year 2021 average furnace what I can tell you went over the \$4,000 mark for the first time and so to see it down in this original data at \$3,300 I know it's just because we don't have a good sample yet and we'll get some more and that will go up unless the supply is there again. But, from what I'm reading and what I'm hearing as far as labor and labor costs, it's not the case. Cooling, the cooling program will open on May 2nd, 2022 and will operate through August 31st, 2022.

If I may just continue Ken and take the liberty to do that unless anyone has any questions.

Ken Gossel: Please do.

Andrew Bryk: Wonderful thanks. So, the regular component that October 1st date, it's one month earlier and it's a little bit more than a month earlier than the previous program year and I'm hoping that does provide some relief so that as you said earlier today, what a nice day for the program to be opened, and yes, it is. And had it not been opened, I think we would have had some people knocking on the doors of the local department Social Services or Charitable

organizations looking for some assistance to get through until the program did open. So, I have to say kudos to all who gave that input and really pushed the agency to have an earlier opening and I think the households that we serve will really benefit from that so thanks for being adamant and thank you for pushing us.

The Tier 1 add-on benefit this year, last year Ken you asked me why did you increase the vulnerable? Well, we balanced it out. We understood the vulnerable households being home during the pandemic, we wanted to make sure that those households really had additional funds to make sure that they were there. Then we're seeing Tier 1 benefits with increased costs in a comparison. I know it's not a huge benefit increase, but it was increased by \$10 so it's increased to \$41 for this year. The Tier 1 and Tier 2 benefits for heat included were both increased by \$5 this year so the Tier 1 benefit is \$50 and the Tier 2 benefit and that is Tier 2 or households above 130% of the federal poverty guideline but below 150% of the federal poverty guideline or around 60% median recover. That benefit those were both increased so that's a good thing and that will really help our households who have heat included in their rent.

The regular benefit for this year we have that March 15th date, we will evaluate the program, as we always do. We have it monitored on a weekly basis, the ebb, and the flow, it's a block grant limited funding re-monitoring and we shut it down and thank god we haven't had to do that in the last few years but not knowing what we don't know, and who could be potentially new customers for us or new eligible, that's a real wild card for us as we get into this program year.

What I didn't speak about earlier, but I will now is the regular arrears supplement.

Ken Gossel: There's a course of hurrahs and applause here if you didn't hear it.

Andy Bryk: Yeah, I had to catch myself so Ken thanks for bailing me out. It's an amazing thing and huge impact. Over 30,000 benefits.

Kira Pospesel: I have to speak out. There was a Commissioner's meeting earlier this morning and you know it really would have been appreciated if we had more of a heads up on this program because it's a lot of work for the local districts. I basically took the paper and separated them and give them to every standing body I had, or I couldn't have gotten it done. I mean I'm not complete. So, that was really kind of a debacle coming out of the gates and we need to put our heads together to figure out what to do with it. So, I guess we would appreciate having some sort of input into that.

Andrew Bryk: Had we, we did and there's no excuse, but we did the best we could and what we did was nothing and why I can't talk is because of the huge effort that the local districts but into this. Why this is a success? Why can I tell you today that even though New York hasn't fully obligated their funds, we are almost \$60 million obligated in RAS funds since September 22nd. I've never seen something like this besides an auto pay and as far as what I'm considering all district initiated auto pays because many of them never involved the client even having to be involved, contacted because the districts were able to do collateral contact with the vendors, ascertain the amount of arrears, go up to \$10,000 wiped out countless arrears for households

that I can't imagine having that. I've seen the data, it's scary. Worst example was the \$72,000 household in a particular utility territory that I won't mention but \$72,000 yeah, it's a blind, elderly disabled account \$72,000. I can tell you today that household is \$62,000. A drop in the bucket again is that, yes. But you know what, to a household that had the average benefit of about \$1600 those households, we impacted the budget impacts I can't imagine. And it's all the work, thank you Commissioner because of what we did with what you did.

Kira Pospel: Let me tell you the way we viewed this and the few positive stories that we had. Because of that, we were able to get people into permanent housing that in reality would have never been able to get into permanent housing because they would never have been able to get rid of these arrears that they had, and the power wouldn't have been turned on or whatever was going to happen. So that has been positive. If we weren't in COVID and housing was more affordable, I think we would have been a bit more productive, but this only happened because of this horrific pandemic. So, there are some amazing stories and I hope you're going to hear some other ones from other counties because people did appreciate it. It's just that all of a sudden it came at the same time we were opening the program and some people weren't ready to be up and running yet so it really was a little early Christmas surprise.

Andrew Bryk: I didn't, you know what is the right time and that was really what it came down to and if you know some of us had our way, we probably would have flipped the switch down a little bit earlier and it just came down to when was when and when could it be done and in the future, yes, we will make sure that every Commissioner is made aware of the program prior to a directive going out, prior to us going to your HEAP staff, but we did because we felt it to be imperative to get the message out to the staff and we knew that the directive was coming. Unfortunately, that directive got delayed a little bit in between the time that we conducted those WebEx meetings to make sure the information was out there, and the seeds were planted, and everyone knew what was coming but unfortunately the Commissioners were the last ones to learn on that and we've learned from that and in the future, you will be notified first. But it is amazing. The stories are amazing. I can tell you the dollars that are going out and those, I hope that what we've done is enable those households to trust us a little bit more. I hope now we have more households that we can, I'd rather see a more meaningful regular benefit, and you've probably heard me say this in the past, than having crisis situations. And maybe let's see where we are come this January and let's see what the need is or what the need isn't, and we'll address it as it comes. I do believe that that was a great program. It built on the effort that the districts did, again, for Clean and Tune. I can tell you we definitely surpassed what we did last year and that's the ability from my recall, I don't have it in front of me right now. We did do better last year. Did we expand the \$2 million? No, we didn't but I want to say in my heart of hearts it was at least \$1.2 and today it could be as much as \$1.3 million of last year's funds, and we will push this. We're over \$200,000 today on that program. \$150 million is out obligated right now for the regular benefit. That \$55 million, almost \$60 on the RAS, about \$700,000 went out the door for HERR and about \$200,000 in Clean and Tune benefits were just attributed to this program year. The regular benefits remain with the exception of those increases on the add-ons and the renter's benefit, the heat included in the renter's benefit, the regular benefit stayed the same. The emergency benefits which will open in January right now, as of 1:43 on November 4th stand at the same benefit amounts as they were last year. going into this, based

off of not reducing our benefit amounts through the last couple of years as prices had fallen or stayed steady, we felt we had enough cushion until we got the fuels report a few weeks ago which really pushed us to really have to consider what we can do with the available funding that we have to meet those emergencies in the event that prices do go. And I can tell you propane prices are over \$5 a gallon. So, we haven't seen that in a number of years and that's a pretty scary point to start the heating season with. So, we'll have to consider where we're at, what is needed and where we can go.

On the Heating Equipment Repair Replacement component – those benefits are available in person interviews remain suspended for the time being due to the pandemic. They can be done over the phone.

The Clean and Tune is going to continue to go on. We will provide additional lists as soon as possible so that districts do have the opportunity to do outreach throughout the program year or at the point of contact so that it does work into their business model and so not to burden them. So, we are learning a little bit slow, but we will get there.

The Cooling Assistance component – as it was, we did increase it to \$15 million. So, we have \$15 million set aside for that. There is still the 1 in 5 per eligible households but the change for this program in the Cooling Assistance component is that we opened it up households with a vulnerable member, they do not need to have a medical condition exacerbated by extreme heat. Thus, households with vulnerable members, a child age 6 or under or under age 6, age 60 or older household member may receive a HEAP funded air conditioner if they haven't received one in less than 5 years or they currently do not have one that is less than 5 years old. So that benefit will be available starting in May and will continue to partner with the Department of Health to get the message out in certain areas that they do Health Home Initiatives throughout the State.

Kira Pospesel: Andrew can I ask you about the Clean and Tune initiative. Staff were telling me earlier this morning that our providers here in Greene has pushed back all the cleanings into February. I'm just worried about doing some sort of initiative in the next couple of months because people have a very short memory. If our biggest provider is holding off to February, and the other thing that happened is our biggest provider for furnaces told the staff it's going to take 5 weeks to get a replacement furnace if they can even get the furnace and they're anticipating maybe there's some furnaces we're not going to be able to get because of the supply issues. So, I don't know what you've been thinking about that.

Andrew Bryk: Yeah, we are monitoring that to make sure that currently we're only hearing bubbles of that. There are pockets where there are supply issues. If we need to take emergency measures, you know we can always do temporary relocation, nobody likes to take us up on it. It's available, obviously not until the emergency component opens. If we get into situations where we need to make exceptions, there's always those exceptions to policy where if we need to do something to take appropriate action, we can do what we need to do. If we have to increase the funding available...

Kira Pospesel: Andrew I just have to jump in. We no longer have that supply shelter beds or the hotel rooms. So floating people to motel beds and shelters, they are completely full right now. So that is not going to be an option. I just started Code Blue, I'm within hours of Cold Blue and I have nothing left. And to think in February if somebody starts losing their furnaces, we have no place to put them.

Andrew Bryk: We will, there are some flexibilities. We haven't pushed out additional monies for this, but local districts are always able to utilize their administrative funds if they want to purchase temporary heating for households and lend those out. We haven't done that in years so as far as we have to increase benefit amounts so that we can get those benefits and get lined up so that our money is good, and they know. You know, most of our contractors know when they are guaranteed cost that the funding is back, it's good, we do comprehensive work, they're going to be paid. If it's a supply issue and then it comes down to where they're getting it and if it's about a cost issue prohibiting us from getting supply that is available, we can always make exceptions and if we start seeing more of what you're saying, then we do have the ability to increase the benefit amount so that we can make sure that we can get the supply at the cost locally where it's available. And we always push, for years now for Energy Star. You know they're still, and Andy please just close your ears, in an emergency situation that's why I mentioned temporary heating solutions, there are temporary heating solutions to get the households through if we need to. If we are able to coordinate with weatherization, if there's air source heat pump solutions, the drawback is to do a whole house at \$40,000 as opposed to \$6500 or \$10,000 if we made a limit and the availability and the availability of vendors that could do it. So, there might be a situation where we have to piece things together to make sure that we have our bases covered and that could be a combination of measures to make sure that our households have those protections.

Kira Pospesel: Andrew I think on our guarantee letters when I was speaking to the staff today, we have to tighten up those timeframes. They're telling me things that they authorized in August and September, those checks were being sent out on the 26th and the 28th of October. So, we're getting repeated phone calls back on those guarantees and I know it's guaranteed, but staff is basically touching the same piece of paper 3 or 4 times because people are repeatedly calling.

Andrew Bryk: Guarantees for furnaces Commissioner?

Kira Pospesel: No, no for benefits.

Andrew Bryk: Oh okay. Yes, those benefits are starting to go out the door and so any of those guarantees I think we'll start seeing those calls diminish. I saw there's over \$130 million that have gone out over the last 2 weeks of the month and there will be more funding going out today. So those payments are hitting the street and we will continue to pay on an equal cadence going forward.

So, if there's no other questions about this year's HEAP program, if I could highlight a little bit about the Low-Income Water Assistance Program. I know, as I said, Keri, Anna and Helen

have been working diligently on this since probably last January but really March going forward. June, we received a directive from HHS about a state plan, gave us a template and let us build a program based around the Home Energy Assistance Program. New York State received about \$60.8 million dollars as a result of the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan Act. Those funds are available to the state through 2023 that is September 2023, the end of, September 30th. And they have to be expended again by December 30th of 2023. Anna can I put you on the spot? Would you like to talk about how you're standing up a statewide state administered water program and how the program is envisioned to operate?

Anna: Sure, so we are currently working with our ITS staff to build a statewide portal that applicants would be able to log in and apply for the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program. We are also developing a paper app to complement that that we will have a link to download, we will also have printed copies for local districts to have. We will have staff on-site to be able to answer questions and then also process applications for these benefits and right now, our tentative start date is December 1st of this year. So, we're looking forward to getting this up and running. We have started to contact vendors to get them involved in the program and we are developing outreach information for both potential applicants and vendors to participate in this program. Are there any questions on the water program?

Kira Pospesel: Could I just ask, what's going to be the fancy name or are you actually going to call it the Water Program?

Anna: It's the Low-Income Household Water Assistant Program. So, it is a mouthful the acronym is LIHWAP

Andrew Bryk: And I think our website says Water Assistance right.

Anna: It does.

Andrew Bryk: So maybe that's what it comes down to is New York Water Assistance and...

Kira Pospesel: Yeah, I thought you would call it something cute like New and Bubbly or something or Midas Bubbles or something funny.

Anna: We had some acronyms, I know as Andrew said, there have been a few of us involved with this program for many, many months and it's been a lot of long hours so there were some acronyms that were thrown around, but those were late at night and not for public consumption so, we're going with LIHWAP for now or Water Assistance.

Kira Pospesel: I appreciate that thank you.

Millie: Can I ask a question? Is this also going to be available for New York City?

Andrew Bryk: Yes.

Anna: It is yes correct.

Millie: Okay so they would do it online?

Anna: Online or there will be a paper application.

Millie: So, we're working with DEP for New York City?

Anna: We have been in contact with staff at DEP regarding this program.

Millie: Okay so okay so then we would just ask customers to contact DEP or do the Water Assistance Program online?

Anna: The DEP has its own water assistance program so...

Millie: I know that's why I'm asking.

Anna: This is a separate program from the DEP program.

Andrew Bryk: Millie, tell them to apply to both.

Millie: Yeah, so that's what it is because I know that DEP and HRA they have been working with but if this is another program, so then I could just tell them to go to the online so they could apply for the State Water Assistance Program right.

Anna: Correct.

Millie: Alright I just want to make sure. Thank you.

Andrew Bryk: And so, Anna will you touch on the priorities for the first phase and what the potential second phase in 2022 could look like?

Anna: Of course, so phase 1 will focus on applicants with past due bills especially focusing on those who have their water and wastewater shut off or have a shut off notice but definitely if they have a past due bill, and for our purposes, that's 20 days after that bill was due is considered arrears and we will be able to help them with up to \$2500 for water assistance \$2500 for wastewater assistance or if they have combined drinking water and wastewater bill, that benefit would be up to \$5000.

Phase 2 if we don't run out of money with the arrears program, we would focus on current bills so in order to be eligible for the program, it has the standard eligibility in New York State resident citizenship and for the water program you would need to have a water or wastewater bill in your name.

Millie: Do you have to be the owner?

Anna: You do not have to be the owner, but the water or wastewater bill does need to be in your name.

Millie: Okay, alright thank you.

Andrew Bryk: And then if I could add to what Anna said, thank you Anna, she's deep into it as you can see and a great, great, asset to OTDA, thank you. What we did also bring into this and what we will expect, our tax bills which was the real delicate situation here in New York because depending on the taxing structure of either the local municipalities, generally the municipalities, there are also private water in New York as we all know. But depending on how municipalities set up their tax structure impacts the water. And opposed to utilities for energy, water was a totally different animal and it just because of the tax, because unpaid bills in certain areas get shoved over to local property tax bills, the effort is how do we address that? And we will address that. The water bills that are attributed to tax liens we can pay that to in generally with the same collection, the assessor's office that is collecting for both entities, so those funds can be transferred over. We will pay whatever the billing entity is we're calling it, for those situations in addition to just bills that are over 20 days since the due date. So, it was just trying to reach the largest number of households. Because if a household has a current bill but yet has a tax lien from last year for water or 4 years' worth of water, how do you address that? And so that was really something that we wanted to braid into it so that we could make sure that we are addressing those households also. There is no assistance in Phase 1 for rate assistance per se. In phase 2 if we get to bill assistance, then we will address other households besides households that have the bills in their name, and we'll expand the eligibility beyond customers of record but possibly customers who have water included in their rent. It's just we will have to look at the available funding and at the 69.8 there's Admin, there's outreach, there's systems developing costs that are going to come out of that. So right now, the only funding available for LIHWAP are the two bills that I spoke to CARES and ARPA. There are discussions on the hill and I guess we'll find out more. I don't know if there will be additional funding if it's done through a continuing resolution, if we end up with an omnibus budget going forward. There is a real possibility there could be additional ongoing funds just like there are for LIHEAP for LIHWAP and we'll have to see what that looks like at that point. The agency that's currently administered through at the Federal level is HHS and that is another point of discussion on the hill, who is the appropriate administering agency? With the infrastructure bill currently being pushed and reduced, modified, whatever there was push for water infrastructure not for bill assistance directly to customers. So, we will have to see where this program goes. Currently it goes out to 2023 and I believe the way we designed it with it being a state administered portal, I hope that we are able to get the funds out as quickly as possible through the statewide financial system. All I can say is Helen, Anna and the rest of the staff they're working with our vendors. This is a huge task and I'm glad to be working with whom I'm working with because they've done a ton of work in a short period of time. We have a website address, there is nothing there so I won't send you there but there will be a LIHWAP water website on that as soon as we can. If anyone is interested, I will offer, we can share with the Block Grant the state plan for water if anyone wants to digest that it's available for public consumption. We just haven't posted it up to our website since we don't have a water website yet. Keri Stark is working through that

framework and Anna and Helen will work with the Public Information Office and we hope to get that up very quickly in the next couple of weeks and then we'll have additional information and outreach information as we work with the vendors and get out vendor agreements out. We're working on a toolbox so that the vendors have information to share with their customers so that they can get information out and that people are aware of the program and can take advantage of it. We will send the directive out to local districts so that local districts are aware so they can shake the bush for us and get households in there and have them apply. Anna if I've left anything out, please supplement it please. Go ahead please Commissioner.

Millie: Sorry, I have another question. Do the people have to be income eligible is there income guidelines for this?

Anna: Yes, the same income guidelines that apply to HEAP will apply to LIHWAP.

Millie: Oh, the same income.

Anna: Correct and there will also be categorical eligibility of you're in receipt of HEAP, SNAP, PA or CODE ASSI, the SSI living alone.

Millie: Okay so just I'm giving you because I dealt with the DEP staff that we were working in New York City; a lot of the people were not income eligible for HEAP. They had applied for the program we had in New York City, so this program is only for income eligible via HEAP. They have to be income eligible for HEAP first.

Anna: We're using the same income guidelines, yes, they do not have to be eligible for HEAP but we're using the same income guidelines, that 60% of median income or 150% of federal poverty level.

Millie: Okay alright.

Anna: Whichever is higher.

Millie: Okay thank you, thank you very much. Thank Anna.

Andrew Bryk: ...something though for me I want to tap into that knowledge because you do have a wealth of knowledge there and how can we link your information that you have on your households down in HRA so that we can make, I may ask you if there is some way we can get some additional information right down out into our households in HRA if you would entertain a conversation.

Millie: Yeah, I think we should because I think there's going to be a lot of people eligible but not based on HEAP income guidelines. There are a lot of people that were eligible when they did the program before. HRA had a program with DEP before. I don't know if it's still in existence at this point because now I'm under HEAP, but I just know that there was lot of people that had large amount of bills at that time and I'm talking about large bills and not \$1000, about 10,

\$15,000 water bills and New York City a lot of people have not been paying their water bills so I mean I could look at this but I just wanted to see what the income guidelines for this new program was going to be.

Andrew Bryk: Wonderful. I would dare say knowing who I'm working with on this project expect a telephone call or e-mail pretty shortly.

Millie: Okay, thank you yeah, I think it would be nice.

Andrew Bryk: Awesome and that said, Ken I will put you on the spot and I know that we're hungry for exposure. Do you believe there is any room or any bandwidth for the utilities to help promote this?

Ken Gossel: Potentially Andrew right I know it is a little bit sensitive, for instance using potentially bill envelopes for messaging and things like that but I think it's something that certainly we could explore with the other utilities and maybe there is something that could be done there to just simply share that message.

Andrew Bryk: Or any electronic presence or links or anything, I'm really digging, I'm really digging?

Ken Gossel: Yeah, we have the site for HEAP and the other benefits, Mybenefits.gov that is fairly predominantly pronounced so yeah perhaps it can be added to utility websites near those as well, other programs. Will the MyBenefits take them there eventually if they fill out, I guess all of the information, it will correct?

Andrew Bryk: There is currently no functionality between MyBenefits and LIHWAP but thank you for that note because there will be a big old note on the top of it now and I'm sure that Helen just took the note down and put a big asterisks there. We need to get a hold of MyBenefits counterparts to make sure that LIHWAP is predominantly thrown right on the top of that, that you cannot apply for LIHWAP through this but if you believe you are, please link out to LIHWAP. Thank you that was gold.

Ken Gossel: Sure.

Andrew Bryk: And then I will drag come on Andy jump into the pool with me. What do you think where the real boots on the ground in addition to the local departments of Social Services are the weatherization assistance providers around the state, the community action agencies? How can you know I know that I'm working with DPS and we're going to be doing a little bit of a road show to get out in front of the municipal government leaders for the winter preparedness that's coming up in either December or January where we'll talk about it, but the bottom line is there's a lot of good agencies on the ground in addition to Social Services which we will ask to shake the bushes for us and we'll get a GIS out to them but is there any bandwidth out with the weatherization providers to help us on this one?

Andy Stone: Good question. I mean obviously we'll help anyway that we can Andrew. I mean there used to be a lot more of our community action friends that were directly involved with processing HEAP and were engaged in it and they're not so much now. So maybe you and I should talk off-line to see what else we can do to keep things moving along.

Andrew Bryk: Once again, thank you Andy. Knowing the people that I'm working with on this project, I would daresay you should expect a telephone call shortly. And I say that in the best way. I can't believe the rocks that they have pushed up the hill in the last 6 months and you know I get a daily agenda of what we're going to get done today so that we meet our deadline so that we can get the systems out to the households. So, you'll have to forgive me if I put my hat in my hand at every opportunity and I appreciate on the frontend any assistance that we can count on from everyone as we stand this up.

So, if there's no further questions...

Vivvy Williams: Andy, hi this is Vivvy.

Andrew Bryk: Hold on if you will give me a second, I know that I have committed to I will commit to providing an update on 2021 and I will get that prepared and I will send an e-mail out to all of you immediately and we'll get that out so that you have that information. I apologize for not having it right at my fingertips. I do apologize. I think the last, besides an open discussion if anyone wants to have an additional discussion is the final item. Ken if I may it would be the schedule that Vivvy would like to discuss.

Ken Gossel: Andrew did you want to quickly the ultimate item LIHEAP performance measures you want to mention that quickly.

Andrew Bryk: Oh, LIHEAP performance measures, that is I'm totally looking forward to what the impacts are not so much for 2021 but what 2022 is going to look like because I can't wait to put in the big goose egg in those columns as far as energy burden on some households because we met their total energy needs this year. But that's my funny side. The real side is the work that's being done. The work that's being done in-house by our staff, ITS, and our vendor partners. Like I said, there's over 40 in fact over 45 Anna you can correct me if I'm wrong. I know it's over 45, it might be 46 to be exact or 47 because I think we pulled a couple of people into the pool this year but that is a huge task. It goes out to a secure file transfer. The file has to be picked up. The files have to be uploaded, they have to be annotated, research needs to be done and we get that information back. The files are all out. The files are being returned. So, we are getting the information back as we speak, and we will put together the performance measures report for this year and we will submit that in December when it is due. I am looking forward to seeing what the numbers look like. As I said earlier and in one of our previous meetings, that was a single state audit that we had findings on the electric amount in one particular column. Emily and the IT staff did correct that so we're going to have the report rerun for last year, we will have this year's report, and we're drilling down deeper for our validation of that file and that report going down to the case level data to make sure that all of the buckets are appropriately supported at the case level and so I will have additional information next time

we meet about both the household served and the performance measures report and I do look forward, as I said with a good heart to next year's report. Because I cannot wait to see, we anticipated about 120 to \$150 million in arrears that was at a point in time, and I know that point in time has come and gone and that arrears could be higher or lower. Based off of what I know about the bill obligated, we are well over, we're just about halfway to where we believed we would be, and we do have the additional funds available. On the arrears side, I would be remiss if I didn't say this because I'm glad you didn't say it, but I will bring it up, ERAP the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, we are working on the utility portion of that at OTDA. As you know on the rental side those payments are going out the door. No utility payments have gone out as of today. They are finalizing the final workflow to make sure that the payment files can go out to DSS. Emily Urban my co-workers have finalized the revised vendor agreements due to both the need of our vendor and the treasury reporting requirements for ERAP dollars and so there's a little bit different data need and so that is done. It is getting put into our final, we do internal and final clearance before it goes up to our executive level. It will be cleared out. We plan on having that vendor agreement out in the next 2 weeks, possibly 3, I have to give a little wiggle because I hate to fail, and we'll get that out. We hope to be able to, once those are in place, get that final process in place, get it totally tested, get the payment file tested, make sure that everything is good and start making payments as quickly as we possibly can. We are meeting multiple times a week to make sure that that effort is supported and that we can get that done and that we do have real time validation and that was part of the directive that we put out with RAS was to guarantee the benefits so that once we knew that ERAP was the validation of the arrears was coming so that there wouldn't be an overlap where we could reduce and mitigate that risk as much as possible for the duplication of benefits. In both of our vendor agreements we have provisions for the return of those if multiple benefits are returned or are guaranteed but we want to avoid that at all cost and I'm sure every vendor that we work with wants to avoid that at all costs. So that is in the works and it is being finalized. It is taking a little bit but it's just another one of those, there's a lot of irons in the fire, a lot of programs being set up some things new, some things old and it's been a tribute to the state at OTDA and the local districts and our vendor partners. You know our vendors and vendor partners and vendors that we're working with to stand up in the different programs in a herculean effort and I think some of the numbers prove that it's been, as I like to joke, is the juice worth the squeeze and in every effort here I have to say yes it was even though I leaned on, we OTDA collectively and each of us have leaned on each other to make these successes happen. So, thank you all. I'll stop there and I'll let Vivvy have the floor.

Vivvy Williams: Yes, good afternoon everyone. I wanted everyone to know that I have reached back out to the media center in regard to us meeting back at the Empire State Plaza for 2022 our meetings and they did inform me that the media center is opened back up for business and I want everyone to know that I went on to schedule our meetings to be held back at the media center. Now, if you're not able to come into the media center or call in, you still can do that, call into the media center. They do have things set up with the COVID regulations so we would have enough room to be sitting apart from each other but that is confirmed. All the four dates are confirmed for 2022 at the media center again. So, if anything changes, because everything is still ongoing and things are changing a lot off and on, if anything changes in regard to the media center of meeting there, I will inform you ahead of time in regard to us doing a webinar

again or it will be held at the media center. So, I will let everyone know. And the meeting right now, we scheduled for February 4, 2022, May 5, 2022, August 4, 2022, and November 3, 2022. Does anyone have any questions?

Andy Stone: That February 4th date is a Friday is that day correct or should be go the 3rd.

Vivvy Williams: Let me see the August 4th is on Friday.

Andy Stone: The February date, February 4th.

Vivvy Williams: The February 4th that's the date that was thrown out to me so...

Andy Stone: we normally meet on a Thursday.

Vivvy Williams: Yes, normally on a Thursday but you know what thanks for pointing that out, I'm going to look into that why was that date moved to that. So, February 4th okay I'll look into that and see why that was moved to a Friday. Okay thank you I'll look into that to find out exactly. Does anyone else have any questions?

Ken Gossel: No, thank you for scheduling it. It will be helpful to see one another again in person you guys have done a great job in helping to carry this along but it will be nice to get back to a little bit ordinary. Thank you.

Vivvy Williams: Yes, okay you're welcome.

Andy Stone: Indeed, Ken I have one more question. Andrew you mentioned that the performance measures and the energy burden report is going to be done as of when?

Andrew Bryk: It's being compiled as we speak. The files go out, they come back, we compile the information. We will submit that once we get an action transmittal. Last year it was a little later because they didn't get a renewal on the OMB form. But generally, that report is due in December on the 15th of December, and we will get that into HHS by that date.

Andy Stone: Can you share that report with us? Is it possible to do that and have it ready for that February meeting?

Andrew Bryk: Sure, definitely and I will also have some final 2021 households served information at the same time.

Andy Stone: Thank you.

Ken Gossel: So now we are open for discussion or any new business speak now. Thank you. Well Andrew I knew you didn't put them to sleep so great job. What I'm going to do is entertain a motion to conclude the meeting please.

Kira Pospel: And I will offer you that motion.

Ken Gossel: Thank you Commissioner.

Andy Stone: I second Ken.

Ken Gossel: Thank you Andrew. All in favor?

All: Aye.

Ken Gossel: Thank you very much for participating, I know the team at OTDA will circulate the minutes and we'll have those ready for next time, but you all have a wonderful day and winter. Thank you for joining us today.