

HEAP Block Grant Advisory Council Meeting Thursday, May 5, 2022

A meeting of the Block Grant Advisory Council was held via WebEx on Thursday, May 5, 2022. The meeting began at 1:00 pm.

Attendees

Andrew Bryk, Director, HEAP & LIHWAP, OTDA

Andy Stone, Executive Director, NYS Weatherization Directors Association

Darrell Metcalf, OTDA Division of Legal Affairs

Jeffrey Handford, NYS OTDA HEAP

Kenneth Gossel, National Fuel Gas

Kira Pospesel, Commissioner, Greene County Social Services

Paul Brady, Commissioner, Schenectady County Social Services

Vivvy Williams, BGAC secretary

Discussion

Ken Gossel: Good afternoon. My name is Ken Gossel and welcome to the May 5th, 2022, HEAP Block Grant Advisory Council meeting. I am vice-chair and substituting for Sue Montgomery-Corey who could not join us today. We are doing this video WebEx and we have about 9 people on the line so I'm just going to ask everybody to identify themselves please.

Vivvy Williams: Okay do you want to start Andy, or I can start.

Andy Stone: Go ahead.

Vivvy Williams: Vivvy Williams, I'm Secretary for the BGAC. Andy.

Andrew Bryk: Good afternoon, Andrew Bryk, Director of the Home Emergency Assistant Program and the Low-Income Water Assistance Program at the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. And I hand off to Andy Stone.

Andy Stone: Hi, I'm Andy Stone, I'm the Executive Director for the New York State Weatherization Director's Association.

Vivvy Williams: We can go over to Ken.

Ken Gossel: Ken Gossel, National Fuel Gas.

Vivvy Williams: Kira.

Kira Pospesel: Hi, my name is Kira Pospesel, I'm the Commissioner of Social Services for Greene County.

Vivvy Williams: Paul.

Paul Brady: Paul Brady, Commissioner of Social Services Schenectady County.

Vivvy Williams: Okay. MSC what is that? I see MSC on here. Okay how about Jeff.

Jeffrey Handford: I'm a Temporary Assistant Specialist with OTDA Heap Bureau.

Vivvy Williams: And we have a phone number.

Darrell Metcalf: The phone number ending in 5 3 6 4 is Darrell Metcalf, OTDA's Division of Legal Affairs.

Vivvy Williams: I believe that is everyone that's on at this time.

Ken Gossel: Great, thank you very much Vivvy. I'm going to start the meeting asking if anyone has any changes to the circulated meeting minutes from February 3rd of this year.

Andrew Bryk: I did have one in the beginning just who was present in the meeting. Emily Urban should be listed at the top of the members present. Sorry, that was not caught before it went out to everyone.

Vivvy Williams: Thank you.

Ken Gossel: And Kira there was some a few blanks because I think we had some technical difficulties page 8 through 10 where we were cutting out a little bit. I don't know if you've got anything to fill in or whether we're really good as drafted?

Kira Pospesel: So, I was looking at those and I couldn't fill in all the magical words correctly to make it make sense. So, either A I didn't make sense, which is possible um so that's why I'm kind of silent. That's a really bad answer I know but I'm being brutally honest.

Ken Gossel: No, we don't need to guess at it, and I still think really excellent notes and everything really of substance was captured. So, any other concerns? If not, with Andrew Bryk's amendment adding Emily Urban, I'll accept a motion to approve. I didn't quite hear that.

Andy Stone: So moved Ken.

Ken Gossel: Thank you Andrew.

Male: Second.

Ken Gossel: All in favor?

All: Aye.

Ken Gossel: Thank you. So, we'll jump right into our first discussion topic, and we turn it over to Andrew Bryk; federal funding updates please.

Andy Stone: Andrew you're muted.

Andrew Bryk: Good because I was able to get the frog out of my throat, I was just saying if I can get through this piece of it, I can get through the rest of this Block Grant. So good afternoon everyone. You noticed somebody is missing from the group today. I would be remiss if I didn't mention Charlie Brennan, he passed last week. A little hard on me, I just found out yesterday.

Andy Stone: We all found out.

Andrew Bryk: I sent an e-mail out that I'd like to read to all of you and this went out to the older staff here at OTDA that's with Charlie at work. I had the honor to say, I'm saddened to inform all of you of Charlie Brennan's passing last week. Charlie was a passionate man who was tough on all of us but always did the right thing in the programs for the benefit of our customers and not for the state. And I sent that out last night and I said, yes at tomorrow's Block Grant, I believe it to be imperative that we recognize his contributions to assist New York State's Low-Income Households specifically his contributions to HEAP and his active participation in recent Block Grant Advisory Committee. He always made me think; he always kept me on my toes. He will be missed. Thank you all.

Ken Gossel: Thank you Andy, yep, he will be greatly missed. I'm just learning of it, but he was a huge contributor to this effort, a great supporter and I'm sure that we were all focused on doing the right thing to help customers and clients. Thank you.

Andrew Bryk: Sorry about that but you know you guys all know me; I wear my heart on my sleeve. You see what you get. But he was a good man. He was involved in all of our spaces in New York State, all of the energy space and he always advocated for our customers. And so, thank you all for taking that moment to recognize Charlie.

So, federal update. New York State we received an additional \$36 million on 4/20. That presents 99% of the FFY2022 funding that we expect to receive from the state. We, at this point, the remaining 1% is the wildcard whether or not HHS will release that at some point down the road and if there is a re-allotment of funds from other states which normally is out September, you know last year we got re-allotment of I think it was \$171,000 on September 30th and we had to allocate that by October 1st. So that was always a good one. So, we never know what's actually going to happen with that final trickle of funds. That said, we have \$376 million in FFY 22 funds in house right now and that puts us in a good position to be able to continue operating the program for the remainder of the year. That said, surprisingly with all of the funds between ARPA and the FFY22 funding we're spending a lot of funds obligated for households that really needed assistance this year through the different programs and benefits that we offered. In addition to the HEAP Bill Assistance benefits we did allocate 15% to weatherization a full 15% and we did have 10% allocation for State and local administration programs. Neat thing about next year's FFY23 budget if I could just bring that up, the FFY23 budget would increase LIHEAP funding by about \$175 million nationally. From this year was \$3.8 billion to about \$3.975 billion next year. The other interesting thing is that in the President's proposed budget, he allowed LIHEAP grantees to allocate up to 2.7% of the LIHEAP allocation towards LIWAP. There was a specific LIWAP Low Income Water Assistant Program allocation in the President's budget, but for us and so nationally that would equate to about \$107 million out of the LIHEAP appropriation going to water across the country if that was the case. It is the option of each grantee to be able to do that. For us, that would equate out to \$10 million carve out for the water program out of next year's HEAP program. That's something for consideration for all grantees. So, I just wanted to let you guys know that. So that's the federal update at this point.

Ken Gossel: Super, thank you. We'll just right in back to you with the 2022 program update please starting with the regular benefits.

Andrew Bryk: Okay thank you Ken. To date I'm going to give you a run down and then I'll start right into the regular, but I'll just jump into the regular. Right now, year over year we're about 100,000 benefits higher authorized on the regular benefit component. That's 1.5 million benefits as opposed to 1.4 million benefits the same time period last year. The regular program did open a month earlier October 1st, 2021, and it did close on April 29th, 2022. The average regular benefit this year was \$490.00. The benefit amounts I know we did not change that since we opened so I won't get into that unless anybody has any specific questions about the benefit amounts.

Andy Stone: Actually, Andrew I do have a couple of questions regarding benefit amounts. I know this is not relevant to the past program but with electric rates going up are you anticipating that the electric benefit could potentially go up?

Andrew Bryk: We will be reviewing all of the fuels. As you saw this year, especially with the distillates for the, you know 33 to 42% is gas and oil and electric increase in cost. With that being the projection going forward we will have to review our benefit amounts to make sure they're appropriate. I know there's a lot of discussion around electrification as we move forward and the shifting of the energy burdens and to make sure that the benefits are appropriate. There is a combination of things that should be able to supplement that household's annual energy need and at an appropriate amount.

Andy Stone: I ask about electric in particular because of the push for electrification due to the CLCPA and coalition that's working with that. I think you and I talked a while back about the electric benefit in particular and why it was some much significantly lower than an oil or gas benefit. If we're going to transfer gas or oil clients to electrification, they're going to see a significant reduction in their electric benefit. I recognize that electricity is 100% efficient but I'm still curious as to why the electric benefit is as low as it is. Is it because of multifamily housing? I mean I know from past experience that single-family homes that heat with electricity have a significantly higher dollar value that they pay for their energy over the course of a year than somebody with even fuel oil or natural gas. Is there any possibility that with the push through the CLCPA for electrification that you might be reexamining the electric benefit and in particular single-family electric benefits?

Andrew Bryk: Definitely we will be.

Andy Stone: Andrew is that a yes answer? Is that something that's going to be looked at?

Andrew Bryk: Definitely. A strange thing about the electric is, oh sorry, no I'm not muted, the strange thing about electric is up until about 2 years ago it was still BTU, BTU, it was the cost data demonstrated that it was still the most efficient means of heating as crazy as it sounds. It's foreign to me, I can't understand it but the data was what it was. I don't know what it will look like with the spike that we've seen in the last couple of years. So yeah, Andy that's a great point. We would be remiss not to examine that especially with a lot of the beneficial electrification that is going on in your CLCPA.

Andy Stone: Yes, exactly and with the net savings that folks are going to recognize by switching fuels to electricity is going to be offset by reduced HEAP benefits, so we want to obviously make sure as a group that it doesn't become a wash. I mean that kind of eliminates the intent of

electrifying other than, then it becomes solely carbon reduction as opposed to net savings for low income. So, I think it's a pretty serious issue that has to be further discussed.

Andrew Bryk: Noted. Okay on the other regular benefit, the Regular Arrears Supplement benefit, I don't have a year over year comparison since we never did it before. It was a brand-new program. We worked in conjunction with the utilities districts just did an amazing job. I have to commend every social service district in the state. 141,000 RAS benefits were authorized from the end of September and mid-March. It was an amazing undertaking, and the average benefit was about \$6,072. We provided up to \$10,000 for households that had arrearages. And I can tell you we authorized over \$270 million out to the utility companies for arrearages through RAS in that short period of time. It was the districts, and they were amazing. It made huge impacts on households. It eliminated arrears for many, or it reduced drastically arrears that they had anything above \$10,000. I still thank all the utilities who back in March of 2020 provided us data that filled that whole program and staff at OTDA that redid it three times before it actually made it to press. And I have to say, it was good. If we can do it again, I would do it all over again. I'm sure the districts would give me some input on how we could do it better, but I still believe it was an amazing success where the timeframe under the stimulus under pandemic relief, excuse me, we were able to...

Kira Pospel: So, Andrew on behalf of the districts, if you want to do it again, just give us a little heads up and we'll give you a few tips okay?

Andrew Bryk: Thank you Commissioner. So that said, the emergency component. The emergency component opened, we had a first and a second emergency, you guys were aware of that back in January when we had the last Block Grant or in February when the last Block Grant took place, sorry I was able to join you all. To date, we've done 71,000 emergency benefits, first emergency benefits. We've done 17,000 second emergency benefits and on Monday, we extended the emergency benefit component through August 31st, 2022, and we authorized a third emergency benefit. We believe that by keeping the emergency benefit component open, we'll be able to assist households that still have arrearages, still in emergency situation and also to be able to assist households that have the added demand of electricity because of cooling during the summer months. We did close the regular component so that is closed but the emergency remains open.

The Heating Equipment Repair Replacement component – year over year it's about the same, it's up about 300 benefits statewide so we're right now year over year 2200 as opposed to 1900 benefits have been authorized. It opened in October, and it will remain open through the end of September. A couple of interesting points about the repair and the replacement component this year and I mentioned that last time we met and I'm sure Emily mentioned it in February. We're seeing an ebb and cost both on the repair side and the replacement side. Although our averages are 4,280 and \$976 dollars respectively, that number last year was the first year we went over 4,000. It was always about 39, 37, we went over 4,000 right now we're almost at 4,300. And that's a \$300 jump in 1 year and still halfway through the year. That's significant to me on an average benefit. So, we've been getting a lot of inquiries from the local districts, from vendors and I know that downstate there has been a lot of estimates that have been coming in that are right at that \$6,500 threshold that we have for the HERR program. And that is another thing, just like the electric, we need to look at what we can do with the Heating Equipment

Repair Replacement – either increasing the maximum benefit across the board or allowing districts to request waivers on individual cases to be able to make sure we are able to safely install the proper heating system. Because that is one of the comments that some of the vendors have informed us that even at \$6,500, we're getting to the price point, and I know the averages don't always say that, but at \$6,500 even those price points, can we do it safely? Are we making sure that it's done properly and that we're really using public dollar to the best value so that long-term the equipment is installed properly and properly sized for the housing and it's installed properly and calibrated so that it actually is going to operate for the expected life of the equipment? And then if we can couple and double down with Clean and Tune on those units to make sure we're extending the life, I think, I'm open to it. I know it's been a few years, we put a group together to discuss heating equipment and what that looks like and what we're doing, and it might be an opportunity for us. If it's about increasing the dollar amount, that's fine, that's not a big systems change for us. If it's about policies, that's where we have to really put our nose to the grindstone to try to improve that. So, Andy, I'm looking right at you as I'm speaking.

Andy Stone: Absolutely. There are three factors that are going on with this thing right now; supply chain is one of them, can the heating contractors even get the equipment #1. Number 2 is the issue of labor, there's labor shortages across the state and across the country. And then third the final upward pressure is if you want to get high on the list, how much are you willing to pay? There's so much upper demand because of heat pumps and electrification and everything that's happening in the HVC industry that there's a lot of pressure out there to be pushed up to the top of the list. And of course, as soon as you want to move to the top of the list, you've got to pay the price for it. So, we're seeing that across the board in weatherization. We're seeing some agencies that can't get equipment or they've got significant delays and lags in the supply chain to even get equipment. So, maybe it will be temporary, I hope it will be and then you may see this as a bump in the road as opposed to permanent. Hard to say at this point. I think you're going to have to just keep an eye on it and make some determinations. You may want to do a temporary move and then see as things smooth out what happens from there. But I mean we're hearing from different suppliers they can't get a lot of the equipment they're looking for.

Andrew Bryk: Kind of like the housing market, doesn't seem to ever go down. So, I'm wondering if this is going to be similar. We can only hope. But that said, thinking about beneficial electrification and the ability to potentially do air source and pumps, what would that look like and what is that price point that would need to be hit to make an investment?

Andy Stone: And equipment is changing all the time. We're trying to keep up with training and every time we update our training, equipment comes out with new modification to the equipment. Well, we could talk all day on it but there's a lot that's happening in the cool climate heat pump industry right now.

Andrew Bryk: Thank you. Don't be surprised if I reach out and say it's time to get everybody together and let's see what we can do to put our brains together to see if what we're doing is still applicable to the market of today, something that we did 10 years go. Thank you very much. So, the Clean and Tune, I have to jump on that. It is a little bit of a highlight and I know it's not a total sweep, but I am liking where we're going considering that we still have a few months left in this and that we've seen as of recent an increase in the number of Clean and Tunes. So, year over year we're about 1,000 Clean and Tunes higher than we were last year at this time. So

about 3,000 Clean and Tune benefits have been authorized at this point. The average Clean and Tune \$262.00. That jump right now in the last month is weird, I just don't know if it's the vendors now have free time to actually get the Clean and Tunes done so I'm wondering if this is the time of year that we want to shake the bushes just a little bit more. Because I can tell you we're over \$1 million out the door on Clean and Tunes right now. The last time I looked it was about I hope I didn't just hang up on my commissioner because I just did. So, I think there is still money on the table for Clean and Tune that we could be looking at and making sure that we're shaking the bushes. So, do you guys agree that this might be the time? Commissioner I'm looking at you Paul, Kira.

Kira Pospesel: I totally agree because you know obviously, we were backed up last fall when I was pushing them and I know that there was a waiting list into the early winter months and then there were other issues so I agree now is the time. But I don't want you to be too proud of that number because that's still a very, very bad number and we're still getting an F on Clean and Tunes. So, we have a long ways to go to get into the A category. He looks like he's an undercover spy, doesn't he?

Andy Stone: I guess he can't hang up on the Commissioner twice.

Andrew Bryk: I am so sorry.

Andy Stone: That's okay I said, I guess you couldn't hang up on the Commissioner twice.

Andrew Bryk: I literally did I'm so sorry. If you can't see my face how red it is right now, yes, I did and only under the guise I'm being present in my current meeting. So, yeah, I'll let you know how that works out for me.

The Cooling Assistance component just like the third emergency and the extension opened on Monday. So, May 2nd the Cooling Assistance component opened statewide. We did allocate \$15 million to the Cooling Assistance component this year. That said, big change on cooling this year. We did remove the requirement for a medical condition that is exacerbated by extreme heat as a requirement for cooling. We still have, do you have an air conditioner that's less than 5 years old, is it operational and all that. But we have removed that. we hope that expands cooling and provides cooling equitably across everybody, all household. We've been doing a concerted effort with the Department of Health both at the State and at the New York City level to promote the cooling program and cooling in general for everyone because it just doesn't affect low-income households. That said, New York City did launch Cooling online this year. It is the only spot in the state where you can apply for a cooling benefit online. We hope to be able to do that upstate through My Benefits next year. We just weren't able to get it done. New York City just made it happen. So that is happening right now. I don't know how that will change things, but I will report back to you next time we meet those changes and how they impact the program. That is FFY21 in a nutshell. Does anyone have any questions?

Ken Gossel: None thank you. Very informative, excellent job all around especially with the RAS benefits Andrew, I can say from the utility perspective looking at numbers and discussing with some of the other utilities that this segment of our customer base is in a position where they're actually an aggregate better off than they were at the start of the program. So, it's extremely helpful and beneficial to them. we're working on some other matters right now with

the Public Service Commission, Department of Public Service, OTDA is aware of some of those but we're looking to come up with some arrears relate forgiveness so thank you very much.

Andrew Bryk: And that's great. I'll just coattail right on that. You know that we're working with the joint utilities and EAP group on the new legislation that put forth \$250 million in state funds and I know there's additional funds and I'm sure that's what you were referring to in addition to that that the utilities and rate payers would potentially be putting into this pot. But the original \$250 for EAP customers and some other customers that are in our qualify programs; we're doubling down to assist the utilities and DPS to make sure that we maximize the enrollment in to the EAP programs. We have committed at OTDA to provide all of the utilities, the joint utilities the big ones an updated list of the total HEAP universe broken out by a zip code by service territory. That will include all of up to date most current key recipients for this program year. It will include households that received HEAP, heaters benefits, or heat included benefits whether they were issued to the utility or issued as a rent heat included benefit on an EBT part. So, we will be providing a new updated refreshed list so that they can do maximum enrollment of the HEAP customers because we found some gaps. Honestly, I'll say it; we found some gaps in our data matching and thank you to all utilities. Thank you National Grid, AARP and Depalp for pushing us. So, I think it's a good thing at the end of the day. Additionally, we're preparing to include some direct referrals of temporary assistance customers who did not receive HEAP that were not in your initial file match that we did. We've also committed to doing a letter campaign out to SNAP non-HEAP recipient SNAP households that are in appropriate living situations that did not receive a HEAP benefit and receive a SNAP benefit, would qualify for an EAP program if they are a customer of one of the utilities. So, we're putting together a list approximately the bulk list was approximately 171,000 households, I'm sure it will whittle down once we remove the institutionalized and different ineligible living situations that would never constitute a utility customer. We will then send letters out to those households and refer them back to self-enroll with the utilities utilizing that letter as documentation received by one of our benefits. I hope that that initiative does help you guys and I just wanted to let everyone know what we were doing.

Ken Gossel: You said it very well Andrew, just for those that aren't aware each of the large utilities have energy affordability programs as established through the Commission and these provide monthly discounts to the low-income households. Historically, it is driven by HEAP eligibility, and it had been expanded first down in New York City to SNAP and other public assistance benefits, but as of this fall, through a commission proceeding, all the utilities worked to get really an online application for self-identification of these customers as being eligible for the program. So we all amended our tariffs to include all of the other public assistance programs that would qualify and I believe most, if not all of the utilities have gone live with on their websites the ability for a customer to both enroll and upload documentation, the letter Andrew is referring to is in draft and it has some information which includes the utility websites, and the letter itself is to just, it can be used as proof of eligibility for one of these programs. So, we're making it as simple as possible for customers who have previously not been identified as being eligible for the programs get enrolled in the programs. Thank you very much for your assistance.

Andrew Bryk: I think it's a great collaboration for the immediate need and I think it may have moved us forward on a longer-term solution until we are able to do something more automated.

Ken Gossel: Great, so if there's no other questions on that, at this point, State Plan Needs Assessment is the next item on the agenda.

Andrew Bryk: So, the needs assessment for FFY23 is underway. It started the beginning of April. It will run through the end of next week. We put out legal notices in all of the statewide publications and newspapers, so hopefully you've seen those at this point. We sent out letters to all of our elected officials statewide, our local district commissioners to the Block Grant, to all of the different groups Policy Advisory Committee for the Weatherization and the collaborative through NYSEERDA's what used to be the Low-Income Forum so that we could get the message out to as many stakeholders as possible. I would be remiss to say we also hit up DOH and New York State Office of the Aging. So, we did ask each of those entities share the information with their stakeholders so that we can get as much public participation as possible as we draft the state plan for FFY23. We are right on plan or on target to be able to have public hearings in July. So, the plan currently is cloned, it's being updated. We do have some revisions that are being made to the application, just cleaning up some stuff from past years that never got cleaned up. We do have some information that's required from HHS, race, ethnicity, homeownership, and renter that we do need to start capturing. We're cleaning up some language in our instructions regarding social security number and it's pretty, it's pretty intense right now, the initial reading of it, you know it's what we've inherited over the years. So, we had an opportunity to review it and it could put people off or it could artificially kill the application process if somebody was to read it. We're trying to make the application process as streamlined as possible to make the client experience a little better so that things that we're doing just to push a rock up a hill, that the rock doesn't need to be pushed up the hill, we're reviewing our policies, we're reviewing procedures to see are there opportunities, streamline it. Are there things that have been in place for years that are actually systematic barriers to program access? So, we're looking at our program in that way to see if there's opportunities to improve it. We have started to receive comments. The staff last week conducted Needs Assessments with the local districts. They broke them up into two groups. They were lively conversations, and we were able to get a lot of good information about procedures, what's working what didn't. How can we improve? What does the customer experience look like? And how is it, the impacts, changes that we've made on the program impacted local district operations? So, we're always open to things to improve the program. So, I think that's a great thing. I'll stop there because you know I will talk the bark off a tree on that one.

Ken Gossel: Great, so the last scheduled item on the agenda was the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program.

Andrew Bryk: And I do have one more item that I just inserted in my notes that we're prepared. Our numbers are few guys. Process for nominating individuals for the Block Grant goes through the Governor's Office, the Senate, or the Assembly leadership. Each one of you could make direct recommendations. I think we may want to think about, it's not a place for OTDA but it is a place for the members of the Block Grant. We have spaces available; we've had spaces available for a few years now and it goes across all of those three bodies of government. So, I will just put it forth that I love talking to all you guys. I think you're amazing, brilliant people. Is there anybody we would like to bring into our group to supplement our discussions?

Andy Stone: Third time's a charge. Listen Andrew I agree with you, and I mean obviously it's not your place because this is an Advisory Council. Ken, we have low numbers and, of course, with the loss of Charlie God bless, God rest his soul, I think we do have a couple openings and I know Sue is not present today, but I think we probably should discuss additional membership.

Ken Gossel: I agree and it's something we can start up throwing some ideas together and I think it would be beneficial to have additional viewpoints on things that we're not familiar with, but certainly important things to bring to the table.

Andy Stone: Is it arranged Andrew, Vivvy may you know I haven't looked at the bylaws in a while. Is there a number we're supposed to maintain or is it a range?

Andrew Bryk: There's 8 positions through the Governor's office. Vivvy you can take the spot if you want to go right ahead.

Vivvy Williams: I would really have to check positions that should be filled or can be filled) but now we were really, really down in a lot of different areas.

Ken Gossel: Vivvy it would be helpful if you could share with the other participants the Council members really the spots filled and the ones that opened? That would be a good starting point for us to take a look at.

Vivvy Williams: Okay. I can send that out to you, you know the numbers and how much in different areas represented. But I'll send that out to you.

Ken Gossel: Andrew do you have anything also not on the agenda but performance measures?

Andrew Bryk: Performance measures, I can tell you right now the performance measures report for this program year has not been submitted to HHS. We did experience some issues with performance measures report and splitting out of the CARES Act from the base funding and we had to redo that, so the grantee survey was held back, that is the first portion of the performance measures report and the second portion the actual performance measures report. I am happy to say that ITS did rerun that it was due 30 days ago did get an extension from HHS and on the 1st, we did get an additional 30 days from HHS for performance measures so that we can validate the report and put it through the OGS internal affairs department. The neat thing about performance measures HHS in addition too, you have the performance measures website that has grantee profile information state by state. HHS also launched a performance measures dashboard that is now publicly available so you can see the metrics you can see the state profiles, and that goes right up to FFY21 with grantees supplying that information. So, we'll have up to FFY20 data available out there and the neat thing is, is that the average across the board on their map that shows the energy burden ratios by state, after HEAP across our total spectrum, we are at 6%. That said, there's room in that average to hit certain fuel types to make sure that we're doing a little better for certain households to make sure that they're getting an equitable share of the benefits. So yeah, really cool stuff. And I've been involved in that just a few years now and every time I meet with the Performance Measures workgroup or every time, I have an opportunity to meet with the group in person, they are truly amazing and get so much out of it and it just enlightens you and makes you think about your program a little differently and what is possible. Normally, we think about, no we can't do this and why we can't, or this is a barrier to why we can't and sometimes it's just really nice to see, let's shoot for the stars, and what are the opportunities? What are the potential goals? And data seems to really

lay the path in a lot of ways to understand what we're trying to do and set a goal and a metric so that you can measure to see if you're achieving that. So, there's some really neat things there in the case studies and I think a lot of information from HHS is also shared in that forum. They have remote people from HHS on their workgroup and it gives a good opportunity to really know what's happening, what HHS is thinking, what's coming down and what it looks like going forward. So, yeah thanks for bringing that up. That's another thing that you know I'll talk about for a long time.

The water side of the house though if you don't mind, I'll just jump right into that. I think that's where you were going to bring me.

Ken Gossel: I was exactly.

Andrew Bryk: Get Andrew back onto the arterial there I love it. As long as it's not on the inner or outer loop getting around Rochester. I don't even know if it's still there anymore. I think they were getting rid of it right?

Ken Gossel: They were.

Andrew Bryk: I understand why. So, the water program, \$69.8 million just under the \$70 million program. To date I can tell you out of the total fund about 56, \$57 million is broken out for benefits and there's about \$43 million left. So, there's about \$15 million out on the street that's working. It's an ongoing process. We still do, for those of you that don't know, the water program is an OTDA administered program we spun it off, it's a sister program of HEAP that came about through the Consolidated Appropriate Act and through ARPA. Those two funding streams funded the program for that total amount. As opposed to HEAP, which is state oversight locally administered, the water program is a state administered program. We are doing that at OTDA. We have about 40 staff that are processing the water benefits from a hotline to a back office portal to an appeals process to a vendor recruitment and the whole systems development piece in addition to, I really have a real appreciation for all of the work; 1, that was done when HEAP got started up 40 years ago and I have a true appreciation for all of the work that the local districts do. I don't know how you guys make it look so seamless and this is right to the Commissioners, you guys I have a true appreciation for what you do on a daily basis just trying to make this program successful and flow from scratch. Because if it wasn't for Keri Stark and her staff, it would not happen. They are amazing, it's an amazing group. They are working with constituents on the phone. They're talking the applications online. They are taking them only phone and mailing them out. So, they're meeting people where they're at. Helen and her subgroup are working through the 3,000 that's yes 3,000 water and wastewater vendors in this state. We have about 10% of them that have signed up at this point. That said, we do have a few vendors that we have applications for, and we are soliciting them physically. And that is really the focus. We're working to get everybody in and triaging the vendors where we have applications in-house. Anna and Helen have been out, I have to say Anna did it too been doing a lot of I don't want to say a road show because we're not doing road shows anymore but we're doing a lot of WebEx's. The American Water Association, the American Water Works Association, NYWIA we worked with the Department of Public Service to have a statewide meeting in both water and HEAP were presented on that to get the information out. We did a mass mailing out to all 3,000 entities across the state. We've done a mass e-mailing and we are literally rotating through that list to reach out to those vendors. We're working with

State Legislative Affairs to work with the local government officials. Paul thank you, we got Schenectady signed up. I'm doing whatever I need to do including reaching out to and using my network to be able to get my foot in the door. And Paul just so everybody understands, I reached out to Paul what 3 weeks ago...

Paul Brady: No, it's probably, keep in mind I would like to take credit for that, but it wasn't me. I called the Deputy County Manager who worked for the city. She hooked you up.

Andrew Bryk: That's networking. Thank you and so with that I said to staff, "If you run into situations, let me know" because if we can use our network and any leverage we can do to get to the right person, literally I can tell you I've picked up the phone myself. You all know, Ken I think that's how we met when I was doing a lot of vendor management and you know I'm not why and I literally, I'll just say down in Suffolk County, my first call was they thought I was soliciting them. I said, "I'm not soliciting you, I'm from New York State." And they were like, "Well we can give you any information." I said, "Can I talk to your boss?" Well can I help you? Well, who do you report to? And I ended up having to get transferred like 5 times before I got the Chamberlain on the phone and then the Chamberlain, "Send me your information." And it was a done deal. So, it's about knocking down the doors, getting the right people on the phone or getting in your face right there. I give Helen credit, she went to the Town of Ravenna, was talking with them on the phone and then ended up say, "Well you know I drive by there every day on my way to work, how about I stop by in the morning, and I'll pick that vendor agreement up from ya?" So, we're not too shy to beg. My hats in my hand if anybody knows your municipality shake the bush. Let them know we're playing ball. We have up to \$5,000 per eligible household, \$2,500 on the wastewater, \$2,500 on the drinking water for arrearages. There is no timeframe if they have them or if the bill is 20 days late, we want to be able to assist these households. It's a streamline application, it's online, it's really easy. There is an attestation, we get documentation from the primary applicant and allow the applicant to attest to the remaining household information. As worked out, our average benefit right now is about \$1,400, \$1,429 going out and that will continue. Those funds are available to the state through September 2023.

Kira Pospesel: Andrew can I ask you a question about that?

Andrew Bryk: Yes.

Kira Pospesel: Is there any way you can let the local districts know what vendors would be in their districts that you do not have an agreement with so that we can have those conversations?

Andrew Bryk: Yes, that's my pen, you've got my pen out so thank you.

Kira Pospesel: I thought that was the fourth phone call we were going to see maybe, I don't know.

Andrew Bryk: God, I hope not because that meeting isn't supposed to happen until after this meeting.

Kira Pospesel: Yeah, we may be able to help with that and that would give us an additional resource.

Andrew Bryk: I will do that, I love that, thank you so much for the offer. Truly appreciate it. That said, we did share a GIS with the local commissioners of the local districts last month letting you

know that we have a lot of water outreach material. We have it in digital format on the 18th of March I don't know if any of you have seen the water ads on your Facebook, on your Hulu or any of your streaming services around the state, little shower scenes with water saying, "Water shouldn't be a worry." It's narrated out. It isn't a live scene, but it does have narration behind still pictures. So, hopefully you've seen that. I know people have because in the last week our applications week over week has gone up by 200, which may not seem a lot when you're thinking statewide but it is a lot that's 200 more than we received the previous week and right now our average is, if this continues right now we're going to get about 4,000 applications for the month of May and that's based off of the last two weeks. So, if anybody would like some information, please feel free to reach out to us. We have that available in digital format. This is one of those things that I think this will assist those households, the same households that are receiving HEAP. We do have categorical eligibility for water so if a house receives HEAP, SNAP or TA or SSI they are categorically income eligible for water and the other criteria is you have to be a US citizen and you have to have an arrears.

Andy Stone: Andrew, Keri sent me the information yesterday that we had talked about so thank you for that, I'll make sure that we get it out and thank you for what you just articulated to us because I needed a little bit more information before I could get it out to my network, but I will get these brochures and the posters and stuff out to my network, and we'll see if my folks can include these in their weatherization applications. I think that would be a big benefit. The one caveat to this right now it sounds like is that the local municipal water has to have a vendor agreement with OTDA in order for you guys to process the benefit, right?

Andrew Bryk: Yes, that is the ideal. Since I do have some vendors just like with ERAP we have 8 municipal vendors that were philosophically opposed to signing up for ERAP. There are some that are philosophically opposed to signing up for water, I don't know why. But anything we can do to shake the bushes.

Andy Stone: The CAP agencies could actually help in advocating with the local water municipalities to get the vendor agreement signed right?

Andrew Bryk: And for those who don't, we're trying to do a work around to be able to issue single issuance checks because we, as I mentioned earlier, we do have applications that we do not have vendor agreements on and we're trying to get OSC to approve a process that would enable us to authorize a benefit based off of the information that the applicant provided us, the bill, we get the bill, we get the stub and do the remittance just like you and I would do, take the remittance, put a check and send it to the municipality and have them credit the bill so that under Business Law we get some customer protections. You pay the bill, you're going to get a customer protection for whatever the billing cycle is whether it be 30 days, 90 days, 6 months, or a year. So yeah, yeah.

Andy Stone: Okay and also, I'll make sure that I forward this to Jackie or the Community Action Association so the Executive Directors for the CAP agencies could help advocate for the vendor agreements.

Andrew Bryk: Thank you. And that's another thing that with the water program, they're really pushing states to collaborate with your administrators of the Community Services Block Grant so that it's great to be able to pay off water arrears but if the toilet is running, we know that, sorry I'll tell you a concrete story. My water softener here at the house, the valve went bad, and

we didn't know about it for 6 months and 147,000 gallons of water went through those pipes. And it doesn't much matter if you put the money in and pay the bill off 147,000 gallons are flowing through the pipes, you still have a \$657.00 bill.

Andy Stone: Well Andrew that was my other question. I mean this kind of leaves folks who have well and septic out of the mix. Obviously, they're not paying a water bill but is there any potential for repairs to septic or I know it's expensive to dig a well but to do some types of repairs for folks who have well and septic?

Andrew Bryk: Right now, the funds are not intended for repairs. That said, if somebody does have a septic service, they have arrearages with, bring them on.

Andy Stone: That's allowable?

Andrew Bryk: _____(muffled).

Andy Stone: Okay alright good that's good to know.

Andrew Bryk: And you know the other you know another example when permissible which we haven't had fortunately is we could if we had a municipality that had water issues, they were unable to provide really a huge thing on a lot of the reservations, they can purchase water for distribution among the people for their customers. So, there are some flexibilities but it's not for infrastructure repairs at this point. We will try to leverage and collaborate with CSPG, with HEAP if you know especially working with a lot of municipalities that jointly bill for water, electric, gas, or waste, you know garbage, how do you collaborate because there's a lot of requirements. They will not accept less than a full payment. You have to pay it in full or they'll accept half a payment, but they don't allow installments and it's been eye opening. So just the garden variety of things that we are...

Andy Stone: and you said at the opening today that there's going to be \$10 million for FFY23 so it looks like this thing is going to continue right?

Andrew Bryk: Well, what do you guys think about that? Personally, I said, it's a not brainer. I don't want to take the conversation, but this would be a \$10 million allocation, let's just say we have \$377 million next year, this would leave \$367 million for the administration of HEAP and \$10 million to assist low-income households with water. And I think HHS or the Feds did not take up water for this year because many states were slow getting the water program up and it went through 2023 and by allowing this carve out, it will allow states like us and some of the larger states that are really doing a much better job that we are, I'll say we are not perfect but we're working on it, to be able to bridge that gap until the federal government can come back and we get a better sense of what that program will look like, who will administer it, whether it stays with HHS or whether it goes over to Environmental Conservation or one of their water programs.

Andy Stone: I mean it seems like the kind of thing that I imagine that some of those arrearages have been standing for quite a while so I would think that possibly with this, you've got \$70 million I mean that's a lot of money to put toward this and if people start catching up, it may not be a bad idea for you to continue to have a smaller component if federal HHS doesn't fund it entirely. I mean it's a pretty small carve out in the grand scheme of things to help folks out, right? I mean that's my opinion on it.

Andrew Bryk: My thought is if we coupled that with whatever is remaining after this program year with the water, right now we think we can, at that average we can probably serve _____(muffled) households. I know that we've received 11,800 applications so far and just about 6,700 of them have been approved. The second phase Andy could also that smaller amount as we do make those households whole and could entail a bill assistance component just similar to the HEAP bill assistance so that we would do an annual supplement. Let's just say in theory we walk into next program year after September starting in October with \$30 million what could a bill assistance component look like to be able to allocate funds.

Andy Stone: Obviously it warrants further discussion Andrew.

Andrew Bryk: That is all I have for you guys today as far as my stuff. I am always open to any other discussion the Block Grant or enlighten me, anything you need, anything that we need to know at OTDA?

Kira Pospesel: Andrew could I just ask you about the opening and closing dates? Do you anticipate opening again in October?

Andrew Bryk: We hope so. I'll be very honest.

Kira Pospesel: I want to see you pick up your pen, you've got to write that down.

Andrew Bryk: I can tell you right now the plan has been cloned so when we clone the plan it picks up everything from last year, brings it to this year and adds a new ending year to it. So that date has not been changed.

Kira Pospesel: Obviously, you're hearing from the districts that it really did help out with the work, and it spread things out and I think it made it smoother for the clients.

Andrew Bryk: Good, this is good to know.

Ken Gossel: So, I'm going to make a last call for any new business to bring to the Council. I see there is none I will go ahead...

Vivvy Williams: We do have our next meeting

Ken Gossel: I was just announcing Vivvy I would allow you to do that but I'm having quite a bit of difficulty hearing you. So, I'm glad you provided it to me, August 4th of this year will be our next meeting and November 3rd, 2022, will be the final meeting of the year before Election Day. So, thanks very much for pointing that out. With that I'll accept a motion to close.

Andy Stone: So moved Ken.

Ken Gossel: Thank you Andy. And a second?

Paul Brady: Second.

Ken Gossel: Thank you Commissioner. All in favor?

All: Aye.

Ken Gossel: Opposed? Thank you very much all for participating. Once again _____(cut off) working with Charlie Brennan and very kind of Andrew to make us aware. So, thank you all very much for your participation and look forward to talking with you again and hopefully seeing you in person in August.

Paul Brady: Good job Ken, thank you.