HEAP Block Grant Advisory Council Meeting

Thursday, August 7, 2025

A meeting of the Block Grant Advisory Council was held via Webex on August 7, 2025. The meeting began at 1:00 PM.

Attendees

Keri Stark, Director, NYS OTDA HEAP

Emily Urban, Bureau Chief, NYS OTDA HEAP

Paula Cook, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, NYS OTDA EISP

Vivvy Williams, Secretary, NYS OTDA HEAP

Diana Yang, Council, NYS OTDA

Leila Eliot, NYS OTDA

Shiran Ybañez, Deputy Director, New York City HRA

Kira Pospesel, Commissioner, Greene County DSS

Ken Gossel, National Fuel Gas

Paul Brady, Executive Director, New York Public Welfare Association

Discussion

Ken Gossel:	Good afternoon and welcome to the August 7th, 2025, HEAP Block Grant Advisory Council meeting. Thank you all for your patience as staff here worked through technical difficulties. My name is Ken Gossel and I'm going to first ask in the room if everybody would identify themselves and then those that are participating via Webex after that.
Keri Stark:	Hi Ken. Thank you. Keri Stark from the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. I'm the Home Energy Assistance Program director.
Vivvy Williams:	I'm Vivvy Williams, I'm the secretary for the BGAC.
Kira Pospesel:	I'm Kira Pospesel. I'm Commissioner of Social Services in Greene County.

Paul Brady: I'm Paul Brady. I'm the executive director of the New York Public Welfare Association.

Ken Gossel: Thank you all. And those on Webex. Could you identify yourself please?

Paula Cook: Hi, I'm Paula Cook. I'm the Assistant Deputy Commissioner for EISP.

Leila Eliot: Hi, my name is Leila Eliot. I am an attorney with the Division of Legal Affairs, the Office of Temporary Disability and Assistance, and HEAP in my portfolio.

Shiran Ybañez: Good afternoon. My name is Shiran Ybañez. I'm from New York City HEAP.

Emily Urban: Emily Urban, HEAP Bureau Chief OTDA.

Ken Gossel: Great. Thank you all for joining. First, I'm going to ask if everybody has an opportunity to have reviewed the May 1st meeting minutes, our last meeting held via Webex and whether they have any corrections.

Kira Pospesel: No corrections, motion to approve them.

Ken Gossel: Okay. Second?

Paul Brady: Second.

Ken Gossel: Okay. All in favor?

Paul Brady: Aye.

Ken Gossel: Aye. Meeting minutes are passed. Thank you. Now I'm going to turn the meeting over to Keri Stark to give a discussion on the 2024/'25 program wrap-up.

Keri Stark: Great, thanks Ken. So, the first thing, I'm just going to give a few updates about '24/'25. So, since we last met, HHS released the last 10% of FFY25 funding. As a result, additional administrative funding will be provided to districts for '24/'25 program year, and districts will be notified of that very soon via an LCM and that will contain their updated allocations. So, for '24/'25 New York received a total of $399,642,677 in federal funding that included $5 million in infrastructure funds.

And I think as we talked last time, the Regular and Emergency benefit components closed on April 7th. We did notify districts of that on March 28th via a GIS. Cooling opened on April 15th and closed on June 23rd. And as anticipated funding was spent quickly, however, we were still able to operate for about 10 weeks, which was only about three and a half weeks shorter than we did the previous year. Well, shorter than our previous five-year average, which was about 13 and a half weeks.

HERR and Clean and Tune benefits closed on May 9th, and that was a diversion from our typical program years where we tried to keep both of those open all the way through September. But funding allocated to HERR and clean and Tune was exhausted in May. The good news was that those programs were extremely successful. We did expend all $11 million for HERR and nearly $2 million for Clean and Tune. So that was good. And just a wrap-up of our program benefit expenditures and totals to date, well, as of 7/25 when the last current report we have. Regular, we had issued 1.57 million benefits and that was about $286 million in expenditures.

The first emergency that was of our 83,300 benefits, which was about 15 million in expenditures. The second emergency is 17,500 benefits and 10.6 million in expenditures. HERR was around 3,500 benefits, 11 million in expenditures. Clean and Tune was 6,000 benefits, 1.9 million in expenditures. And as of 7/25, we've issued so far 14,600 cooling benefits, which is about $11.7 million in expenditures. We still have 7,500 pending cooling applications statewide. We do anticipate that our final cooling spending will be about 17 million and that we're going to serve up approximately 21,000 households with air conditioners once all pending apps have been processed and installations are complete.

So, the next item I'd like to talk about today is our progress on the Social Services Law 131-SS, which is our OTDA utility data sharing project. At the last meeting I discussed the new law, which included a ping system that OTDA developed to match utility information with OTDA data for enrollment and to the utilities energy affordability programs or EAPs as they're known. We continue to have conversations with the utilities at this time regarding the data terms, so we're still working with them on finalizing those terms.

An update on our monitoring. For 2025, all of our monitoring visits have concluded. Our staff are working on getting our final district letters to the commissioners. And then we're also in the process of determining which 15 districts will be reviewed for next year in 2026. Once we have that finalized, we'll send out letters towards the end of this year notifying districts that will be coming for a visit. Also, we are conducting corrective action plan follow-ups with districts who had a cap from the 23/'24 season. So, we are in the process of following up with those districts as well currently at this time.

So federal reporting is our next topic. We're gearing up right now to start preparing to complete the FFY25 performance measures report. That includes we contact vendors to test connectivity and then they send us data on usage, household usage data. And that's what we utilize to help complete the report. And this report's important to us because it helps us determine energy burden for households and we determine their energy burden based on their heating type and income and how much they pay for their heating costs over the year. And that helps us determine whether our HEAP benefits are right sized in the correct amounts to make a meaningful benefit to households.

And we also utilize that data every year into development of our annual state plan. So, we're working on our performance measures. We also are working on our ... We have to prepare and submit an estimated data for our household served report. So, we are working on that as well. And those will be submitted to the federal government. So, we'll switch over to '25/'26, our program and state plan for next season. So as most of you know, yeah, we're in the planning process for '25/'26. We have to develop a plan and plan a program without knowing what our funding will be like for the upcoming program year.

Normally and historically, we do assume that New York State's LIHEAP funding will be approximately the same level year to year. And that we usually base our plan on flat level funding from the previous year, which is what we're planning and that's how we're planning our program as we are basing it on flat level funding from the '24/'25 season. We don't know ... We do know that we're no longer seeing LIHEAP funded at the same funding levels as they were prior to the pandemic and energy costs continue to arise, but LIHEAP funding has not.

The president's budget did zero out HEAP, but we did learn last week that the Labor Health and Human Services Committee put forth a bill to fund LIHEAP at $4.045 billion nationally. However, we may not know the final funding amount until September and the New York State funding amount until middle of October or later. We have been advised by HHS to submit the plan as normal. So, the '25/'26 LIHEAP state plan is due to HHS by September 2nd, 2025. And we are in the process of drafting the plan right now. We do hope to have a more information on our benefits and what components we're offering next year and the benefit amounts hopefully in September after the plan's been submitted and accepted and final funding amounts are known.

Our MOUs. FFY25 MOUs have all been signed and executed for NYSOFA and HCR. We have signed and delivered the MOU and NYSERDA to them and we're awaiting their final review and signature on that. So those are pretty much wrapped up. Training. We did just release our training announcements for the '25/'26 HEAP regional trainings. Those will be held via Webex this year in September over the course of a one-half day training. Districts can now go in and view and register for those in a HSLC. So those are available. And conclusion on my agenda items, our next BGAC will be held on Thursday, November 6th via Webex.

So those are the things I'd like to talk about and update everybody on. But thank you. I'll turn it back to you, Ken.

Ken Gossel: Great, thank you. I did have a question as to the start of early outreach for this next program year. Can you speak to that?

Keri Stark: Oh, sure. Yes. We are going to be conducting early outreach as per usual. No changes yet have been made to early outreach. We still anticipate that we will send applications out to anybody we serve last year and then the specific categories, the elderly and the ones that we also do on a year-to-year basis. We are still planning on doing that as we have.

Ken Gossel: So, timing would be roughly around the time, the start of that when the submission goes into Health and Human Services?

Keri Stark: Yes, it will be. Yep.

Ken Gossel: And do you know when the pull down will be performed this year?

Keri Stark: I do not have a date for the actual pull down. We did just release a GIS to districts this week about the pre-auto pay reports and that those will be available this week, that districts should start looking at those and getting things prepared for the autopay. I don't have specific dates of the autopay as of yet.

Kira Pospesel: And those reports are available?

Keri Stark: They should be available this week.

Kira Pospesel: I've seen them.

Keri Stark: Oh, you saw them already? Oh, good. Okay, great. Thanks.

Kira Pospesel: If I can just ask a follow-up to Ken's question. So obviously we appear to be in a precarious situation. Is anyone speaking to the clients to say the world may not be the same because we're starting to get those phone calls? People haven't heard anything. I mean it appears you're going forward; you're going to get what you need to get. I mean, I would hope somebody would give somebody an opportunity to make another plan or come to a reality in some way.

Keri Stark: Yes. I mean we are planning, again, we're planning the plan on flat level funding, which is all we can do until we find out the actual funding or dollar amount that we're going to get for next year, there's been no indication, again, that we are going to get the same amount. We could get less, we could get more, I mean that the Senate committee had a little bit more in their bill, but I don't know how that's going to play out.

We are looking at evaluating all of the funding that we have and what's the best extent to which, if we get the same amount of funding, what's available to support which components? We are looking at that right now. We are prioritizing our Regular and Emergency benefits off the bat. So that will be the priority to fund those first. And then depending on funding levels and the extent to which we do get funded, we are evaluating the other options that we have. I don't know if that's something that is ... Do you agree that regular and emergency would be things that you would want to fund first before you move on to...

Kira Pospesel: Well, yeah, but at this point, at least in my county, I haven't even sent out contracts to even do this additional work. And it's August and on the mountaintop, I have snow by the end of October.

Keri Stark: Yes.

Kira Pospesel: I know we're dependent on the federal government and even at fast speed, it's going to take me 45 days to turn around a contract. So, as I sit here, I think I'm two months behind in my work already. So, once you seem to get the money, I'm going to be months behind.

Keri Stark: I don't know what else besides once we get the money from the federal government or once we get word, we'll let everybody know. But this is probably ... I mean this is unprecedented at this point.

Kira Pospesel: But I still think some sort of general message to go out from OTDA to say, "Folks, just so you're aware," I mean is it still accurate that there's no office at HHS? The office has been dismissed?

Keri Stark: There are still staff not necessarily completely dedicated to LIHEAP that we know of that they are still communicating with us on the LIHEAP program. I don't know if it's necessarily, they used to have a whole department for LIHEAP that's no longer there, but they do have a few staff that are working with us on the LIHEAP program. We do get questions from different staff, not necessarily the same staff, they're just other OCS staff that will ask questions here or there on certain items. But not the same staff that we used to deal with and not the same staff every time.

Paul Brady: You mentioned anticipating the potential for flat funding. Would flat funding be the 399 million?

Keri Stark: Yes.

Paul Brady: Okay. All right.

Keri Stark: We have-

Paul Brady: So, then you would have some flexibility at least in determining how that money was allocated to the different program components?

Keri Stark: Absolutely, yes.

Paul Brady: Okay.

Keri Stark: And that's where we're going to prioritize our Regular and our Emergency components.

Paul Brady: That's helpful to know.

Kira Pospesel: I'm just going to add one more thing just because timing, everything in life is about timing. So, you know, obviously work requirements are changing for some of the other programs specifically SNAP, of all of a sudden, the lobby, the lobbies in all the counties, have all of a sudden, we're assisting with those rules because those clients are only going to have three months and three years to make sure that they comply. And then we have the HEAP changes. If we can somehow make sure things don't happen in the same month of November would be very helpful.

Keri Stark: Yes, I get that point. I know, and we're all sort of at the mercy of what the federal government is planning and going to do. So, I think we are planning, HHS advised us to submit a plan as per usual. I know other states have submitted their plans and they have been approved, so-

Kira Pospesel: That's good.

Keri Stark: That is good to know. And I think that that's promising to hear. So that's the plan. That's what we can do right now and that's what we're doing.

Paul Brady: I don't know the answer to this question. When our plan goes in, typically how long does it take for it to get approved or historically how long has it taken?

Keri Stark: It was ... I know for this other state that just recently submitted theirs, they submitted theirs in July and it was already approved. This was a couple of weeks ago, so that wasn't ... Yeah, so it was very quick. Historically, I mean, I'd have to look back, I don't know. But I mean, not that I can remember that we had issues waiting for it to be approved. There may be a little bit of back and forth where they were looking at it, they had questions.

Paul Brady: I wondered if it would get hung up in what ends up being budget negotiations that go on between the Senate and the House.

Keri Stark: It didn't sound like that that was going to be any of the issue at that. We don't actually ... In the plan there's not actual specific funding amounts. There’re percentages, like you do say how much you plan to spend on Emergency of your total federal allocation or Regular, but we don't actually put amounts in there or anything like that. There's no dollar amounts in there. And it's just basically a plan of what components you want to run, how you're going to run them, who you're going to serve, obviously, as you guys know. Yeah. But I thought that was good news that other states are getting approvals back fairly quickly.

Ken Gossel:	So, the EAP program that the Commissioner mentioned for the utilities, it's predominantly established using the HEAP benefit amounts. We are looking into following a public service commission order. What would happen with respect to if HEAP does not go forward in that form because of the basis of that program? We've been asked to look at what enrollment on our end might look like. And the parties, the stakeholders to that particular proceeding also have been trying to ask for more money for utility-related bill relief. So, has OTDA talked with the Department of Public Service and I guess are they prepared to talk to the legislators about potentially getting emergency funding if HEAP doesn't end up showing up?
Keri Stark:	I can bring that back. Yeah, that's something that I can bring back and talk about internally and get back to you on that.
Ken Gossel:	Yeah, that would be great.
Keri Stark:	Yep.
Ken Gossel:	Since Andy Stone's not on the line, I'll ask weatherization. Any idea, historically it's been either 15% or 10% of available funds, is there an idea what that plan might contain at this point in time for weatherization?
Keri Stark:	Yeah. I mean, OTDA does prioritize the weatherization program and value that as a needed service. So, we are definitely evaluating that for the next program year along with our other components. So that is part of that planning that's involved. Yes.
Ken Gossel:	Thank you. Any other questions on that?
Paul Brady:	No.
Ken Gossel:	Guess we're to the point maybe of open discussion?
Vivvy Williams:	Any open discussions?
Kira Pospesel:	I guess we're waiting and seeing.
Keri Stark:	Yes.
Vivvy Williams:	Yes.
Keri Stark:	I mean I do want to know. So just with your recommendation, commissioner, about notifying the public, what would you suggest something to...
Kira Pospesel:	I think just to be really honest, to say this program year is going to look different than the other program years. And we're not certain what it's going to look like because when you remain silent and you start dropping

those applications, the clients are going to think that it's business as usual because nobody has really said anything.

Ken Gossel: So, any other new business? Great. Well-

Paul Brady: I don't think so.

Ken Gossel: With that, thank you for attending. I will accept a motion to adjourn.

Paul Brady: Motion to adjourn.

Vivvy Williams: I'll second that for you.

Ken Gossel: Thank you. And all in favor?

Vivvy Williams: Aye.

Keri Stark: Aye.

Paul Brady: Aye.

Kira Pospesel: Thank you.

Ken Gossel: We'll conclude by saying the next meeting of the HEAP Block Grant Advisory Committee is November 6th, Thursday of this year, and that will be held via WebEx. But thank you all for appearing in person. It was great to see you all again.

Keri Stark: Thank you.

Kira Pospesel: Good to see you.

Ken Gossel: Thank you.