

HEAP Block Grant Advisory Council Meeting

Thursday, November 6, 2025

A meeting of the Block Grant Advisory Council was held via Webex on November 6, 2025. The meeting began at 1:00 PM.

Attendees

Barbara Guinn, Commissioner, NYS OTDA

Keri Stark, Director, NYS OTDA HEAP

Emily Urban, Bureau Chief, NYS OTDA HEAP

Helen Schneider, NYS OTDA HEAP

Vivvy Williams, Secretary, NYS OTDA HEAP

Diana Yang, Council, NYS OTDA

Shiran Ybañez, Deputy Director, New York City HRA

Kira Pospesel, Commissioner, Greene County DSS

Ken Gossel, National Fuel Gas

Discussion

Ken Gossel: Hello. Good afternoon.

Vivvy Williams: Okay, thanks.

Ken Gossel: Go ahead. This is Ken Gossel, Chair of the HEAP Block Grant Advisory Council. Today is November 6th. We're gathered to have our quarterly meeting, and I wanted to start by having everybody identify themselves.

Keri Stark: Okay. This is Keri Stark from the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Home Energy Assistance Program, and I will turn it over to our Commissioner, Barbara.

Barbara Guinn: Yep. Good afternoon everyone. Barbara Guinn, Commissioner OTDA. I'll turn it over to Diana.

Diana Yang: Good afternoon everybody. Diana Yang, Deputy Counsel here at OTDA and I will hand it to... I'm sorry. Kira, did you want to say something?

Kira Pospesel: Oh, I think you might've called on me. You were breaking up. But my name is Kira Pospesel. I'm the commissioner at DSS in Greene County and I'll pass it off to, let me see, I think Shiran, I see your name.

Shiran Ybañez: Good afternoon. My name is Shiran Ybañez. I am from New City HEAP.

Barbara Guinn: Helen?

Helen Schneider: Good afternoon. I'm Helen Schneider. I work with the HEAP Office in OTDA. And last but not least, I'll pass it on to Vivvy. Thank you.

Keri Stark: Vivvy, I think if you're trying to speak, you're on mute.

Vivvy Williams: Oh, good afternoon everyone. My name is Vivvy Williams, and I'm the secretary for the BGAC. And I guess everyone has spoken, I believe, and we can pass it back over to Ken.

Ken Gossel: Yeah, terrific. Thank you all. Obviously we're at a very critical juncture with some unprecedented times here. I wanted to thank everybody for all of their assistance and hard work and continued hard work as we work through a bunch of these issues to help clients. And I wanted to just start with asking if we quickly can look at the minutes from August 7th, our last meeting in person, and see if anybody has any changes to those. And if not, we can make a motion to accept them in a second, please.

Kira Pospesel: Council, I reviewed them and I'll give you that motion to approve them.

Ken Gossel: Okay. Any seconds? I will second. All in favor?

Diana Yang: Aye.

Shiran Ybañez: Aye.

Ken Gossel: Any opposed? None. So the minutes passed. Without further ado, let me please turn it over to Keri Stark who can give us some critical updates to the '25, '26 HEAT Program year. Thank you.

Keri Stark: Thank you so much, Ken. I'm going to actually turn it over to our commissioner, Barbara Guinn, who would like to provide a few updates on the government shutdown. Barbara?

Barbara Guinn: Yeah, thank you, Keri. I just wanted to be sure to attend to make sure this group, any participants know that obviously we are very focused on what's happening at the federal level with respect to many of our benefit programs and certainly including the Home Energy Assistance Program. We understand the importance of this program and how critical it is to be able to open as soon as possible. We are urging and working with our DC office to urge to make sure that the federal government acts as quickly as possible and that it continues to support HEAP. We do expect that when

there is movement, that HEAP will be funded and we certainly understand the anxiety and difficulties that's created by the inability to be open now or in the near next two weeks.

So we're continuing to watch it. We obviously are having many discussions about the protections that are available for individuals if they need it currently with respect to making sure that their homes remain heated and that certainly does include applying for emergency heating assistance through the social services district offices. We also appreciate the extent to which getting those HEAP dollars out as soon as possible is also important to district operations, so just wanted to acknowledge that and certainly I think toward the end of this meeting if there are more questions or conversation, we can continue.

Keri Stark:

Thank you, Commissioner Guinn. So I just wanted to start with some of the agenda items that we had, just give a few updates before we open it up for questions. The '24, '25 HEAP program, we did close a successful '24, '25 HEAP year. For our regular component, we issued about 1.5 million benefits, which is around 286 million in expenditures. The first emergency component, we issued around 83,400 benefits for about 50 million in expenditures. Our second emergency was around 17,500 benefits for about 10.8 million in expenditures. HERR program, our heating equipment repair replacement program, we issued around 3,500 benefits for 11 million in expenditures. Clean and tune was around 6,000 benefits and about 1.9 million in expenditures. And our cooling program ended around 20,600 benefits and about \$16.6 million in expenditures. It was a great HEAP season last year.

I do want to provide an update on our progress on social services law 131-SS, which is the OTDA utility data sharing. At the last meeting we discussed the new law, which included a paying system that OTDA developed to match utility information with OTDA data for enrollment into utility companies' energy affordability programs. We continued to have conversations with the utilities on the OTDA data terms and we're still working with them on finalizing those data terms and hopefully we'll have some more information on that soon.

Next update is on our district monitoring for 2025. So 2025 HEAP monitoring has been completed. Findings letters should be sent out soon to districts, so keep an eye out for that. We are currently in process of determining which 15 districts will be reviewed for 2026. And once we have that finalized, we'll send out letters notifying districts in December or January when we're coming out to visit. Additionally, we also completed corrective action plan follow-up monitoring for '23, '24 programs and our caps all went really well. All districts monitored for a cap in '23, '24 are in compliance with New York State heat policies and procedures.

Next, we'd like to provide an update on our federal report. We're starting to prepare our FFY '25 performance measures report for submission to HHS. This is due on January 31, 2026. This report's important because it

does provide data on sources and uses of funds, our average benefits, income for households for each type of LIHEAP assistance received, energy burden targeting, restoration of home energy service, and prevention of loss of home energy service during the fiscal year. It helps us determine the energy burden for households based on their income and heating type, which then helps us determine whether our HEAP benefits are right-sized.

Additionally, we have our household serve report and that's in clearance here at OTDA for submission to HHS. That report provides data on the number of households that received LIHEAP assistance and the type of LIHEAP assistance provided how many households were assisted at different poverty levels and other demographic data. We do have data finalized for all categories for this report, which will allow us to submit that report as a final report ahead of our 12/31/25 deadline.

So now I'm going to switch over to '25, '26 program and state plan. New York's '25, '26 HEAP State plan was approved by HHS, which is great news. That's already been done and completed for funding and components for this coming HEAP year. Since 2020, LIHEAP received additional emergency funding to support households during and following the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed New York State to support a robust HEAP program. These emergency funds also allowed New York State to carry forward unspent funding into subsequent program years. That emergency funding has since ended in 2023 and despite rising energy costs, our base LIHEAP funding has only increased minimally in recent years. Unlike previous years, all of New York State's LIHEAP funding was expended during the federal fiscal year '25. And there are no funds left to carry forward into FFY '26. Therefore, our FFY '25, '26 plan is based on and assumes receipt of the same amount of base level funding that New York received in '24 '25, which was \$399 million.

Because of that overall reduction in federal funding, it was decided that for the '25, '26 HEAP program year, New York State must prioritize regular and emergency heating benefits as well as the cooling assistance component. These benefit components provide direct assistance to low-income households to meet current heating and cooling needs. As such, the '25, '26 New York State HEAP plan did not allocate funds for weatherization, heating equipment repair replacement, also known as HERR, out in the districts, clean and tune or second emergency benefit. We issued guidance to districts, our BGAC members here on the call, other partner agencies and all of our vendors on these changes back in September 2025 when our plan was approved. We do recognize that these programs have benefited lower-income households in our state, and if additional federal LIHEAP funds become available for '26, that state plan will be revisited.

In regards to our benefit levels, there were no changes to our benefit levels for the '25, '26 program year. And next I'm just going to touch upon our component opening dates. In regards to our HEAP component

opening dates, OTDA released guidance on October 31, 2025 that due to a lack of a federal budget, including an appropriation for the '25, '26 program year, in addition to the ongoing federal government shutdown, the opening date for accepting applications for the HEAP regular benefit component has been delayed until further notice. So at this time, the opening date for FFY '26 for regular benefits is dependent on the resolution of the federal shutdown and the funding of LIHEAP at the federal level. Applicants who present to social service districts with an energy emergency prior to HEAP opening should be referred to public assistance, also known as PA. We issued guidance to districts on this process which included information on PA, emergency energy assistance and PA heating equipment energy assistance on October 17, 2025.

OTDA's HEAP and PA Bureaus recently provided training on PA energy emergencies and heating equipment energy assistance to districts, HEAP and PA staff, our vendors, utilities, and the Energy Affordability Program working group. The HEAP and PA bureaus are also working with our partner agencies such as the New York State Energy and Research Development Authority, also known as NYSERDA, to coordinate other types of assistance that are available regarding heating equipment energy needs.

In regards to the other opening dates for our other program components, our emergency component is planned to open on January 2, 2026. And cooling is planned to open on April 15, 2026. Please do note that these dates are contingent on federal action to fund the program and timely notification from the United States Department of Health and Human Services regarding New York State's federal allocation. And OTDA will continue to issue updated guidance as it becomes available to our districts and our partner agencies.

Next thing I do want to provide an update on is our agreement with our partner agencies. Our FFY '26 agreement between OTDA and the New York State Office for the Aging is currently on hold due to lack of federal funding, but we are preparing the MOU for approval and we'll send that into clearance once funding has been determined.

Next topic I'd like to provide an update on is our district training for '25, '26. We held HEAP regional trainings in September via WebEx this year and we received some great feedback on those. We'll keep that in mind when we plan next year's training. Our eligibility and certification trainings for new workers have also been held in the month of October and those have all been completed.

And lastly, I just want to advise that our next BGAC meeting will be held on Thursday, February 6, 2026 at 1:00 PM via WebEx. If you could put that on the calendars please. And that concludes OTDA's discussion items and updates. And I'd like to turn it back over to you, Ken, for the discussion. Thank you.

Ken Gossel: Yeah, thank you. And we appreciate everybody's hard work and assistance here through these trying times. I'm going to turn it over to the other members with questions and new business. Kira, I'm sure you have some.

Kira Pospesel: Well, I wish I could see your face, Ken, when you said that. Anyhow, the experience in Greene has been a little bit different than what I anticipated. The first day that typically would've been our opening HEAP season, we had quite a few people in the lobby, lots of panic on the phone. And we do have an AI phone agent called Eva, so I was able to scan the phone calls and stuff, so people are really looking for reinsurance. We updated the web page. That seemed to deescalate some of the behaviors. And believe it or not, yesterday we did not have one emergency in the lobby. I was literally shocked because the weather here is a bit colder. Tonight's going to be the coldest night. We're going to go in the low 30s, and we had some snowflakes up on the mountaintop already. But I'm not sensing a panic on the HEAP side of the house. I'm certainly sensing panic on the SNAP side of the house, but not on the HEAP side, which I cannot explain.

Barbara Guinn: That's good to hear and hope for you and all other districts that it continues.

Kira Pospesel: Yeah, I think that they think that something's coming real soon. I wish that I felt the same way, but I really don't, but I'm hoping. My fingers are crossed.

Barbara Guinn: Yes, yes.

Kira Pospesel: That's all I have, Ken. Sorry.

Ken Gossel: Oh, sure. I was going to ask, I know a bunch of stakeholders are looking and asking the government, the governor elected officials about providing funding in the absence of the federal HEAP dollars. If that were to happen, would OTDA... Have they been given any thought as to how it would administer any such dollars that are identified and state dollars to fund some sort of program? Would there be a way to take funding and somehow administer it either first with respect to pull down customers that would be getting HEAP and/or otherwise? I know it's speculative, but if that were to happen, I guess I was wondering whether you started discussing whether and how that could work?

Barbara Guinn: We definitely have been discussing that quite a bit over the past couple of weeks. And just, again, in the event that there is state money, if it determines that state money is needed to make sure that we are able to do so, we're continuing to talk through the technical aspects of that and options, but it's definitely something that we have been working on because we agree we need to be prepared. And I think another scenario could be that the federal government acts, but for some reason HHS still takes time to be able to get the funds to the states. And I think that's

another piece that we're worried about and want to be prepared. It certainly will take some unusual actions on part of the state, but certainly is something that we're looking into to be prepared.

Ken Gossel: And in that latter instance, I'm guessing maybe some way to, so to speak, borrow some funds until they perhaps could be delivered, but running a program based on all of the heavy infrastructure that we have and systems, that would be very helpful certainly.

Barbara Guinn: Yes, agreed.

Ken Gossel: Yeah. Separately, we've also been thinking what other ways would there be to get relief to clients, and perhaps in the past there have been some legislative funds that have been through the public service commission's involvement provided to utilities to directly apply to accounts of customers of the utilities. It might be one avenue that if such funds were to happen, the utilities could receive them and apply them to, for instance, individuals that had received HEAP in the past. And we could discuss various types of things, but we're trying to think of some other options that would be available to get immediate relief to customers if it were to happen that way. The utilities be able to holds on accounts for collection related activity and the like, but we're also thinking independently of some potential ways to help ameliorate this emergency.

Barbara Guinn: Thank you. That's very helpful. Appreciate that.

Ken Gossel: I would like to add, just for everybody's awareness, last week, the major utilities did submit an emergency petition to the public service commission that would halt any utility disenrollments of former HEAP customers that are on the utilities Energy Affordability Program, EAP. And what we're trying to do in the absence of, again, receipt of HEAP benefits on perhaps many, if not most, of the former clients, former HEAP recipients, we're trying to prevent disenrollment for some period in time going forward to help avoid a double whammy, where not only are they not getting a HEAP payment, but at the same time, they're losing a monthly discount that they're afforded through the EAP program participation. So I just wanted to make everybody aware of that as well.

Are there other questions from the other members? Okay. I'm going to ask if there's any new business to be discussed. Not hearing any. And I'm very sorry, I was having technical issues accessing via WebEx, so I'm doing this via the phone, so I apologize for that. I guess I want to open the floor to anybody else at OTDA or elsewhere who has any questions or anything further to add.

Vivvy Williams: Well, this is Vivvy. The only thing I would just want to add is just the meeting schedule moving forward into next year, which would be-

Ken Gossel: Thank you.

Vivvy Williams: Yes. Just to put those dates out, it's actually going to be on Thursday. All the meetings are usually on Thursday. We got February 5, 2026. We got May 7th. We have August 6th and then back to November 5th in 2026.

Kira Pospesel: Hey, Vivvy, is any of those meetings going to be in the studio in Albany?

Vivvy Williams: At this time it wasn't discussed if we were going to do one. We usually do it in August. It's a nice time to travel, but we haven't discussed it yet.

Kira Pospesel: Okay. Thank you.

Ken Gossel: Well, thank you, Vivvy. I guess if there's nothing further I'd except a motion to conclude the meeting.

Kira Pospesel: I'll give you that motion, Ken.

Ken Gossel: Thank you, Kira. Second and all in favor?

Shiran Ybañez: Aye.

Helen Schneider: Aye.

Keri Stark: Aye.

Ken Gossel: Any opposed? None. There being none, thank you so much for participating today. We thank everybody, in particular OTDA, for all of their excellent efforts and further efforts to work through these difficult issues. And I look forward to seeing you at the February 5th meeting.

Keri Stark: Thank you, Ken.

Shiran Ybañez: Thank you everyone.

Keri Stark: Thank you everyone. Bye.