

HEAP Block Grant Advisory Council Meeting

Thursday, May 1, 2025

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

Attendees

Keri Stark, Director, NYS OTDA HEAP

Paula Cook, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, NYS OTDA EISP

Diana Yang, Council, NYS OTDA

Leila Eliot, Council, NYS OTDA

Vivvy Williams, Secretary, NYS OTDA HEAP

Kira Pospesel, Commissioner, Greene County DSS

Ken Gossel, National Fuel Gas

Paul Brady, Executive Director, New York Public Welfare Association

Andy Stone, Executive Director of the New York State Weatherization Directors Association

Discussion

Vivvy Williams: So, we can start right now. Okay. Thank you.

Keri Stark: Thank you.

Vivvy Williams: Yes. Hi. Good morning, everyone. We're here.

Ken Gossel: Good morning. Or good afternoon.

Vivvy Williams: Good afternoon. Wow.

Ken Gossel: Afternoon. You tricked me.

Vivvy Williams: Yes.

Ken Gossel: Sorry, I'm having technical difficulties logging in, so I'm going to probably have to do this without camera.

Vivvy Williams: And we are on the air.

Ken Gossel: All right, let me try to get rid of that. All right, I apologize. This is Ken Gossel. Good afternoon. May 1st, 1:00 PM, the HEAP Block Grant Advisory Council meeting. I'm going to ask everybody to please identify themselves.

Vivvy Williams: Afternoon, my name is Vivvy Williams, and I'm the secretary for the BGAC.

Kira Pospesel: And then I'll jump in. This is Kira Pospesel. I'm commissioner of DSS in Greene County.

Andy Stone: I'm Andy Stone, executive director of the New York State Weatherization Directors Association.

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

Keri Stark: I'm Keri Stark. I am the HEAP director for New York State OTDA.

Paula Cook: Hi, I'm Paula Cook. I'm currently the assistant deputy commissioner for EISP, but many of you know me from years ago as a former HEAPster. I'm back.

Ken Gossel: Great. Welcome, Paula.

Paula Cook: Yeah, I think I'm happy to be back, Ken.

Ken Gossel: Glad to have you back. Absolutely.

Diana Yang: Good afternoon, everybody. I'm Diana Yang, deputy counsel for OTDA.

Leila Eliot: Good afternoon. My name is Leila Eliot, and I work with Diana Yang. I'm an Excelsior Fellow at the Division of Legal Affairs.

Ken Gossel: And anybody else on the call? Well, thank you. I'm first going to start with asking if everybody has an opportunity to have reviewed the minutes that Vivvy had sent out with the meeting notice from February 6th.

Kira Pospesel: I did, Ken, and I'll offer you a motion to approve it.

Ken Gossel: That's fantastic. Any seconds? I see no errors.

Andy Stone: Ken, I'll second. This is Andy from weatherization, Sorry I missed the meeting. It looked like it was an exciting one.

Ken Gossel: Yeah, they all are. Well, thank you. All in favor?

Voters: Aye. Aye. Aye. Aye.

Ken Gossel: Any opposed? None opposed. The meeting minutes are adopted. Thank you.

I will hand it off to Keri at this point in time with the federal funding update.

Keri Stark: Okay, great. Thank you. So, I'm just going to provide a few updates regarding some information we received from HHS.

We were made aware in April that most of the federal HHS staff who work on LIHEAP were terminated. There is one or two remaining staff members that we believe are still there. States have been advised to submit any questions they have to a general mailbox at HHS. I have submitted questions recently, and they have been responsive to those questions. So, I did just want to let everybody know that.

Additionally, states were informed to submit our state plan for 2026 as usual. And we were provided with the state plan template and instructions for submitting the 2026 state plan.

Another update regarding the federal government: we were made aware that there were indications that the president's budget showed no funding for LIHEAP for 2026. This was the case for all four years of his last presidency, and we did still receive funding all four years. Because Congress determines LIHEAP funding, we do have hope that we will again receive LIHEAP funding for 2026.

And lastly, I am happy to report that we received word yesterday that HHS released over \$400 million in regular block grant funds for LIHEAP for FFY 2025. And they're expected to complete that release of those funds by today, which would mean New York State will have received then our full block grant for 2025.

Andy Stone: Keri, that's the last 10%?

Keri Stark: Yes

Andy Stone: I'm sorry, I don't mean to interrupt. That's the last 10% we're talking about, correct?

Keri Stark: Yes, that's correct.

Andy Stone: Okay.

Keri Stark: Now I'll switch over to New York State's HEAP '24-'25 program updates. Regular emergency benefit components closed on April 7th. Districts were notified of this on March 28th via GIS. This is about three weeks

longer than we had originally planned in our state plan, with a closing date of March 17th.

Cooling opened on April 15th, and so far, is operating smoothly. We do expect funding for Cooling to go very quickly this year. So, we are stressing to districts to encourage applicants to submit applications as soon as possible.

We also issued guidance earlier this week on Monday that as of May 9th, the Heating Equipment Repair and Replacement, or also known as HERR, and Clean & Tune benefit components will close. This is a diversion from typical program years in the past, where we have tried to keep both of those components open until September. The funding that was allocated to HERR and Clean & Tune ran out quicker than expected.

But the good news is that these programs were extremely successful. It's a testament to the outreach efforts that all you folks have done on these programs. So, more households know about the benefits, and the demand remains steady through the season.

For HERR, we were up about \$600,000 compared to this time last year. And for Clean & Tune, we're up over \$80,000 from this time last year. And we had set aside 12 million for HERR and 2 million for Clean & Tune.

I mean, it's unfortunate that we can't provide those services over the summer months ahead of next winter. But we are grateful that we were able to keep those open and provide those benefits through the cold-weather period this year.

Just an update on our benefits and expenditures as of 4/24/25. This does include pending cases. For regular, we issued about 1.5 million benefits. That's about \$293 million in expenditures. First Emergency was around 82,000 benefits, and that's 50 million in expenditures.

Second Emergency, we issued about 17,000 in benefits and 10.5 million in expenditures. And like I said, a HERR was pretty successful. That was around 3100 benefits that were issued, and that equated to so far about \$10.6 million in expenditures.

Clean & Tune, we issued around 6,000 benefits so far, and that's 1.9 million in expenditures. And for cooling, we're at about almost 5,000 benefits so far. And that's almost \$4 million.

Leila Eliot:

Keri, so sorry to interrupt quickly. Do you have this information that you could send out also at the end, because I'm rapidly trying to write it all down. So, if I get this and not write it all down now, that'd be great. Are you going to send that out?

Keri Stark:

Sure, yes, I can send you the information. Thanks.

Leila Eliot: Thank you so much.

Keri Stark: Sure. Okay. Regarding our OTDA data sharing agreement with the utility companies as per Social Services Law 131-SS, an update on that. At the last meeting, I discussed the new PING system that OTDA developed to match utility information with OTDA data for enrollment into energy affordability programs.

As mentioned in the last meeting, the data terms have been drafted by OTDA, but we are still in negotiations with the utilities on those terms. We'll switch over to monitoring for 2025.

We have staff in Schuyler County this week wrapping up the last of our monitoring visits. Overall monitoring results were very positive, and we were able to identify some common areas where we can focus on in training this year.

We're currently working on our final findings letters to commissioners. We did increase the number of counties monitored this year to 15, and we do plan to keep that number around 15 again next year. And toward the end of this year, we'll determine which counties will be reviewed for next year. And we'll send notifications to the counties selected ahead of time.

Any counties in which a corrective action plan is required for this year will have six months to implement their corrective action plan. And then our staff will go out and will conduct a follow-up review. This will consist of a review of a sample of cases. It's usually a desk review, followed by a review of the results with the district.

Federal reporting: OTDA submitted both our FFY 24 Households Served Report and our Performance Measures Report to HHS, and they were both accepted. The Performance Measures Report is particularly important this time of year, because it does show the energy burden for households based on their income and heating type. And it helps us determine whether our heat benefit amounts are right-sized. And we do utilize that data in the development of our annual state plan.

The '25-'26 state plan: the process has begun. We did have our needs assessment period that ran through April 30th, and that included public hearings on April 15th and April 17th.

So just as part of background on that, we do plan our program every year for the next year, without knowing how much funding we will be getting. Normally we assume that New York State's LIHEAP funding will be approximately the same year to year. But again, we don't have any word at this time on potential funding amounts for FFY 2026. We do know that we are no longer seeing LIHEAP funded at the same levels they were during the pandemic.

And then just a couple of miscellaneous things: OTDA has submitted approval to the governor's office to add a new member to the BGAC from the Public Utilities Law Project. Our next BGAC meeting will be held in August. And as we get closer, hopefully we can discuss about possibly doing that in person, but we can talk about that later on. So, this does include OTDA's agenda items.

I know, Andy, you did want to add something to the open discussion on weatherization, so I'll pass it over to you, Ken.

Ken Gossel: Thank you, Keri. Thanks for that update. Greatly appreciated. Paul, we'll hand that right to you on the weatherization question.

Paul Brady: I think that might've been to Ken.

Ken Gossel: To me?

Keri Stark: I think it was Andy.

Keri Stark: Andy had a question. Yes.

Ken Gossel: I'm discombobulated here.

Andy Stone: That's okay, Ken. No problem. Keri, there's going to be some changes this year in the way that weatherization has negotiated the Memorandum of Understanding with OTDA regarding weatherization this year. Obviously, there's going to be some impacts on the state plan as to rules that are going to be followed, and the way that the MOU is set up.

Can you update me, us on where the current negotiations are at this point?

Keri Stark: Yeah, Andy, thanks. We are in the process of executing the MOUs. They are going through our internal approval process, and we're working with the agencies involved to execute the MOUs. So that is working through the process right now.

Andy Stone: Do you know how close that is to being submitted and signed by HCR?

Keri Stark: It's still going through OTDA right now. Once it's signed by our commissioner, it will go over to HCR for their signature.

Andy Stone: Okay. All right. Thank you.

Keri Stark: Sure.

Ken Gossel: Thank you. Keri, I was wondering if I could ask about the Public Needs Assessment hearing, and how that went and comments that have come in.

Keri Stark: Sure. We are compiling all the comments now. The Needs Assessment period just ended on April 30th. We did receive a few comments that I was able to take a look at, and they were in support of HEAP. That we will post as part of our state plan included in that. That will be a part of that.

Andy Stone: Keri, when do you expect that the draft state plan will be available for the Block Grant Committee?

Keri Stark: We are in the process right now of looking at Caseload Statistics and our Performance Measures Reports in drafting information to send up the chain. Like I said, we do plan our program without knowing how much money we're going to get. We will be planning it on flat-level funding that we received for '24-'25. We are in that process of the early stages right now.

Andy Stone: Do you have a deadline date to submit that to HHS?

Keri Stark: Yes, that's due, I believe it's August. It's by September 1st.

Andy Stone: September 1.

Keri Stark: Yes.

Andy Stone: Thank you.

Keri Stark: Sure.

Ken Gossel: I had another question. Are you aware, was there any state monies in legislation that you're aware of that might be available if the federal HEAP monies are diminished?

Keri Stark: That, I'd have to take back and see if I could get some information for you on that. I don't have any information right now at this time.

Ken Gossel: Yeah, that's okay. Keri, you don't need to. For instance, I know there's been some push for identifying some maybe state funding, should worst-case scenario happen with federal funds. I didn't know if you were aware of anything, so that's fine.

Keri Stark: Okay.

Ken Gossel: Any other new business?

Kira Pospesel: So, I just have one question. Keri, obviously, counties are kind of anticipating our fall contracts and stuff. So, should we just go forward as business as usual, and continue all those things that we had up and running in the previous year?

Keri Stark: We have received no indication otherwise. That's all I can tell you at this time.

Kira Pospesel: Okay.

Keri Stark: We were advised to submit our state plan, so we're moving forward.

Ken Gossel: Keri, do you have the name of the individual from Public Utility Law Project?

Keri Stark: Yes, it's Alicia Corp.

Ken Gossel: Okay.

Andy Stone: Say that again?

Keri Stark: Alicia Corp.

Andy Stone: Alicia-

Keri Stark: C-O-R-P.

Andy Stone: Thank you. Great.

Ken Gossel: Utilities have worked closely with PULP. It's a very great organization. I don't know Alicia but look forward to having some greater involvement and input. That's wonderful. Thank you.

Keri Stark: Sure.

Ken Gossel: So, I don't know if there's any other new business. If not, we're going to maybe wrap up a record-quick meeting. There being none, let me indicate that the next remaining two meetings for this particular calendar year are on Thursday, August 7th. We're hoping to do that in studio in Albany with some great weather, and then the final meeting on November 6th of this year.

So, if nothing else, I'll take a motion to adjourn.

Andy Stone: So moved, Ken.

Ken Gossel: And second?

Diana Yang: Second.

Ken Gossel: Thank you. All in favor?

Voters: Aye. Aye. Aye. Aye.

Ken Gossel: It's unanimous. Any opposed? No?

So, you all have a wonderful summer. Thank you very much for all the hard work that you put in and thank you for all the assistance for your clients and our customers. It's an extremely beneficial program. And just want to thank you all for all that you do.

Andy Stone: Thanks Ken. We'll see you in August

Diana Yang: Have a good day.

Ken Gossel: Enjoy your day.