

## EAP Advisory Board

January 27, 2023

### Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Amanda Noonan (NHDOE), Jessica Arnold (Liberty), Sue Corson (Unitil), Raymond Burke (NHLA), Jeanne Agri (Belknap Merrimack CAP), Lea Francoeur (NHDOE), Gary Cronin (NHDOE), Karen Emis-Williams (NHLWAA), Michael Kraus(OCA, Donald Kreis(OCA), Robyn Sarette(NHEC)

1. Review of October 28, 2022, minutes Ray motioned to approve Jean seconded.

Approved unanimously.

2. Cost able increase in SS benefit.

Jean and Amanda discussed the cost increase in the SS benefit, which has been small in the past (\$1 to \$4), and this year it has gone up by 8.7%, or 77 dollars. The deduction would make EAP customers eligible for the highest tier if it were considered for their income. The dilemma is what we do, Sue mentioned that higher rates are also a factor. Ray reviewed the poverty guidelines and found that 75% of the population is under the poverty line. Does this silence the entire conversation? Wondered if the 77 dollars a month is annual or monthly? According to the report, Amanda stated monthly. Suggested we can look at it before we decide. She will send out updated guidelines for the discount tier. The board tabled this subject to see if anyone was affected. Amanda will update the guidelines and the information on the website and with the CAPS for further discussion.

3. EAP fund balance.

An email was sent out by Amanda regarding the EAP fund balance, which is decreasing with higher energy prices. We looked at the average benefit comparison. The first three months saw lower sales of KW, but the benefit was significantly higher. In December, the average benefit was \$64, where in previous years it was between \$30 and \$40. Average over the last three months was \$57. The budget does not include the money that the legislature approved, which is sitting in an account separate from the main budget and will be used when needed. Interest rates on the fund have increased recently. The enrollment number has gone up, but it's still lower than we expected.

3. State supplemental electric benefit program update

Amanda advised that benefit payments have started to be sent out for the State supplemental electric benefit program. Jan and Val worked to get the 2 programs to work properly. Amanda's feedback was essential. Ray asked why the funds took so long to be distributed. Software limitations, many applicants, and the availability of agency staff put the agencies in a tough spot. Jean explained that the good part of this program is that customers are going into the agencies and finding out they are eligible for other programs such as fuel.

#### 4. EAP Docket/Roger Colton Report

Ray discussed EAP docket order 21-133. The PUC had made statements that there was a concern about the fund and that optimal efficiency had not been obtained, and they were reluctant to approve the budget's report. All the parties in the docket approved Roger's recommendations, and the EAP Board put a lot of time and effort into his report. Ray was looking for the Board's thoughts on filing recommendations to approve the recommendations on Roger's report, so they don't go to waste. He wasn't sure what PUC plans to do. Ray and Don expressed their willingness to draft a petition and wanted the EAP Board and the DOE to be on board.

#### 5. New Business

Ray stated that there will be a significant impact on low-income customers who need to be aware of the additional SNAP benefits added during the Pandemic will be ending. The last month for the additional allocations is February. SNAP benefits are expected to decrease in March. A household of two will lose 100 dollars in SNAP benefits. Many HH are only aware of SNAP pre-pandemic. Karen warned that people will start receiving notices about losing Medicaid coverage. Ray advised that if anyone hears of this, 603 legal aids can help answer questions and do things to maximize their benefit amounts.