

Universal Service Coordination Working Group Report

DRAFT

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Report of the Universal Service Coordination Working Group

- 1. Joint Delivery of Low Income Usage Reduction Program (LIURP), Act 129, Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), and American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA) WAP** – Joint delivery of multiple programs is more likely when there is a shared/common contractor, i.e., Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) that administer both LIURP and WAP. Programs would benefit from centralized energy audit, determining which program measures are installed by which programs; decision tree must be established and billing protocols must be developed; evaluation issue – proposal to consider pro-rata savings on the basis of kWh saved per dollar invested; consider the adoption of a neighborhood-by-neighborhood approach. Further discussion should include how a joint delivery system will affect the utilities' evaluation requirements under LIURP. The Working Group recommends that a sub-group be formed going forward.
- 2. De facto Heating** – This is the term used to describe when customers use portable electric space heaters as their primary heating source because they do not have use of their central heating system. This is not as safe as customers using their central heating system. The number of customers doing so has risen dramatically over the past several years, especially with the dramatic increase in the cost of home heating oil. Consumer education needs to play an important role, along with or part of a possible expanded role of CARES. There is not enough dollars earmarked towards assisting in getting these customers back on their central heating system. The PUC should review methods of funding this effort such as escheats funds and lobby for using them on heating system repair/replacement reduce De facto heating accounts. This problem cannot be solved without more cash assistance. The issue of De Facto heating goes beyond the repair of the appliance. It also includes the affordability issues that surround the customer once they have a working system, i.e. the amount of money needed to restore service and the affordability of customer payments to maintain service. The Working Group recommends that a sub-group be formed going forward.

3. **Communications and Coordination** - The Public Utility Commission (PUC) needs to update its standard pamphlet of Universal Service programs and assist in the development of regional/joint utility brochures on a utility-overlapping regional/county basis. Next, the PUC and utilities should combine efforts to provide information about Universal Service programs to the public as well as to legislative offices. In addition, the PUC should coordinate with legislative-directed energy fairs and CBOs. Finally, this effort should include the development and use of a standard kit of Universal Service program information containing a description of services and an explanation of program eligibility.
4. **Websites** - The PUC should link its Universal Service program information to other Websites, such as Department of Welfare's (DPW) LIHEAP and COMPASS, Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED).
5. **Expanded/Additional Outreach of Universal Service Programs** – It is recommended that the PUC and other key stakeholders take a more active role in offering support of legislation that would implement the 2-1-1 abbreviated dialing code for information and human services referral telephone service. This might generate some momentum for the reconsideration of Senate Bill 559 which includes funding for 2-1-1. In addition, the Working Group recommends that a sub-group be formed going forward that will examine other ways to improve outreach, such as utilities contracting with CBOs to perform LIHEAP outreach.
6. **Connect Customer Assistance Program (CAP) Eligibility with Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) Eligibility** – Utility companies indicated that they could benefit from getting specific customer information from DPW that would facilitate customer enrollment in CAP or recertification of CAP eligibility. Initially, the utilities have agreed to submit a list of specific data elements needed from DPW to BCS who, in turn, will coordinate the transmission of the requested data to DPW. Other DPW programs such as Food Stamps, Medicaid, and TANF can also be cross-referenced as long as income eligibility matches. PECO and FirstEnergy reported that some degree of coordination has taken place with DPW. The Group recommends that the PUC support this initiative on both a short-term and long-term basis and reach out to DPW for assistance, if needed.

7. **Customer Information Waiver and Confidentiality of Customer Information**
 - The Group recommends that all Universal Service and low-income program applications include a standard waiver clause that will allow all low-income programs to share confidential customer information with each other to be used solely for the purpose of enabling program enrollment. Towards that end, the Working Group recommends that the PUC should direct a sub-group to develop such a standard waiver clause in low-income applications, to identify confidentiality issues throughout the coordination process, and to propose remedies and options to maximize the benefits to individual households while ensuring and serving a beneficial public purpose. Typically, waivers that allow confidential customer information to be shared are written in a way that allows for private customer information to be shared within a program, not between or among programs.

8. **Customer Lists** – On behalf of DCED, DPW should request customer lists for high usage LIHEAP recipients from NGDCs on an annual basis. DCED’s ARRA WAP has \$252 million to spend over the next three years. The Natural Gas Distribution Companies (NGDCs) annually serve a relatively small number of customers who would benefit from weatherization. Thus, the need for weatherization exceeds the LIURP budget levels. The Group recommends that the NGDCs provide DPW (who will forward the lists on to DCED) with a list of LIHEAP high users on an annual basis prior to October 1. This initiative will allow more low-income households heating with natural gas to receive the benefits of usage reduction and bill reduction through ARRA WAP. In addition, Electric Distribution Companies (EDCs) should submit lists of electric heating, LIHEAP high-users only if the EDCs cannot treat the customers on the list by April 1 of the following year with either LIURP or Act 129 dollars. The content of the customer specific information on the utility lists should, within reason, meet the needs of DCED. The PUC should encourage the NGDCs and EDCs to provide such lists to DPW on an annual basis until DCED indicates that the utilities no longer need to do so.

9. **Single Source of Information** – Information about the Tennessee FindHelp Web-based eligibility screening tool that provides access to a single source of information to identify programs for which someone may qualify was shared with the Working Group. FindHelpTN is a centralized source of information for state and federal assistance programs that includes eligibility screening, application

instructions, and localized location information for the administering agency. This initiative can best be described as a single point-of-access to programs. Other examples of a single source of information include DPW's Compass and the Governor's Stay Warm and Turn/Seal/Save Websites. The Working Group recommends that a sub-group be formed going forward to explore feasibility for a similar initiative in Pennsylvania. The Working Group also suggested that sub-group members bring along technical staff to provide expertise and advice to the sub-group. Major issues include ownership, development and maintenance, and cost-sharing of the Web-based system for Pennsylvania.

The Working Group recognizes that the single point-of-access described above is a long-term project. In the short-term, the Working Group members have agreed to share current intake/eligibility/application/referral processes, capabilities, and systems with other members in an effort to inventory current practices and capabilities. Towards that end, BCS has agreed to survey the Working Group members, compile the survey results, and share the results to the Working Group members. In this manner, Working Group members can review for survey results for best practices for consideration of adoption into their programs. Of particular note, FirstEnergy offered to hand-over its web-based intake software package known as Chronicles to other utility companies at no cost.