

Low-Income Energy and Water Advisory Board

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January 29, 2025 | 2025-R-0022

Issue

This report describes the Low-Income Energy and Water Advisory Board, including its duties and membership. It updates OLR Report [2021-R-0020](#).

Summary

The Low-Income Energy and Water Advisory Board advises executive branch agencies on developing, planning, implementing, and coordinating energy-assistance and water-assistance-related programs and policies. It advises the Office of Policy and Management (OPM), the Department of Social Services (DSS), and the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) on the impacts of utility rates and water-assistance-related programs and policies. The board must also make recommendations to the legislature on the administration of the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) block grant and the availability and implementation of heating and water assistance programs.

By law, the board includes at least 24 members, including representatives from (1) executive branch agencies (DEEP, OPM, the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA), and DSS); (2) electric and gas utilities; and (3) advocacy and nonprofit organizations. In practice, the board meets regularly and DEEP posts meeting agendas and minutes on its website.

The legislature established the board in 2005 and has since made several changes to the board's membership and duties. A 2015 law required the board to report to the Appropriations, Energy and Technology, and Human Services committees on recommendations for improving heating

assistance programs. A 2024 law expanded the board's duties and membership to address water and water-assistance-related programs and policies and correspondingly renamed the board. The board submitted its [most recent biennial report](#) to the legislature in October 2024.

Statutory Duties and Meetings

By law, the board's duties include the following:

1. advise and assist OPM and DSS in planning, developing, implementing, and coordinating energy-related programs and policies;
2. advise DEEP on the impacts of utility rates and policies;
3. make recommendations to the legislature on administering LIHEAP and approving plans subject to legislative approval; and
4. make recommendations to the legislature on heating and water assistance programs that benefit low- and moderate-income households (e.g., the Connecticut Low Income Household Water Assistance Program) [\(CGS § 16a-41b\(b\) & \(c\)\)](#).

LIHEAP

LIHEAP funds the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program. The program offsets winter heating costs of lower income households. DSS administers the program, in collaboration with community action agencies (CAAs).

The law also allows the board to advise the agencies described above in a similar way for water-assistance-related programs, including programs and policies to alleviate the impact of utility rates.

The law requires DSS to submit the LIHEAP plan and the LIHEAP report to the board at least seven days before submitting them to the Appropriations, Energy and Technology, and Human Services committees [\(CGS § 16a-41a\(g\)\)](#). The LIHEAP plan, due annually by August 1, establishes guidelines for the use of LIHEAP funds, including eligibility criteria, referral systems, outreach efforts, and estimates. The LIHEAP report, due annually by January 30, covers the preceding program year and includes information on the number of applications filed, approved, and denied and the total amount of assistance and expenditures to date.

By law, DEEP must provide notice of meetings to the board's members, provide space and maintain minutes for meetings, and publish the board's reports [\(CGS § 16a-41b\(e\)\)](#). In practice, the board meets regularly and DEEP posts meeting agendas and minutes on [its website](#).

Memberships and Appointments

By law, the board consists of the following members or their designees:

1. a representative from each electric and natural gas utility company;
2. the PURA chairperson;
3. the Consumer Counsel;
4. the Operation Fuel executive director;
5. the Infoline executive director (i.e., United Way Connecticut, 2-1-1);
6. the Connecticut Local Administrators of Social Services director;
7. a legal aid organization representative, designated by Connecticut Legal Services Inc.;
8. the AARP Connecticut state director;
9. a Norwich Public Utility representative;
10. a Connecticut Energy Marketers Association representative;
11. two water company representatives, designated by the Connecticut Water Works Association;
12. the Connecticut Green Building Council (i.e., Build Green CT) executive director;
13. the Center for Children’s Advocacy executive director;
14. the Connecticut Fair Housing Center executive director;
15. two CAA representatives, designated by the Connecticut Association for Community Action;
16. the OPM Secretary (nonvoting);
17. the DEEP Commissioner (nonvoting); and
18. the DSS Commissioner (nonvoting).

By law, the board must elect a chairperson and vice-chairperson from among its voting members. According to [DEEP’s website](#), Clair E. Coleman currently serves as chairperson and Nora Duncan currently serves as vice-chairperson.

Establishment and History

The legislature established the board in 2005 under [PA 05-204](#). According to proponents, the act reinstituted the board, as a similar board had existed in the 1980s before it was disbanded in 1990. Several acts have since made changes to the board's duties and membership. For example, [PA 09-05, September Special Session](#), §§ 80 & 81, added the requirement that the board make recommendations to the legislature on LIHEAP administration. It also required DSS to submit LIHEAP documents to the board before submitting them to legislative committees. [PA 12-2, June Special Session](#), § 167, made the OPM secretary and DSS commissioner nonvoting members and added the DEEP commissioner as a nonvoting member. It also allowed the board to elect its own leadership rather than requiring the OPM secretary to serve as chairperson. [PA 24-37](#) (1) added advising on water and water-assistance-related programs and policies to the board's duties; (2) correspondingly renamed the board and expanded its membership; and (3) required the board to submit recommendations to the legislature every two years beginning in 2024, as described below.

Reporting Requirements

Biennial Report to Legislative Committees

By law, the board must provide recommendations to the Appropriations, Energy and Technology, and Human Services committees on the improvement, availability, administration, and implementation of heating and water assistance programs, particularly those that benefit low-income households. The board must submit their recommendations to the legislature by October 15, 2024, and every two years thereafter.

DSS Report on Common Application and Benefits Portal (2025)

A 2024 law required the DSS Commissioner to consult with the board to study the feasibility of developing a common application and benefits portal for applicants for low-income home energy assistance benefits and Operation Fuel, Inc., ([PA 24-145](#), § 2). The commissioner must report to the Energy and Technology and Human Services committees on the study and the portal's costs and benefits by July 1, 2025.

Coordinating Energy Efficiency and Energy Assistance (2016)

A 2015 law required the board to convene and devise recommendations to improve the implementation of heating assistance programs by coordinating existing energy efficiency and energy assistance programs ([PA 15-5, June Special Session](#), § 107). (Energy efficiency programs generally seek to decrease the amount of energy a customer uses. Energy assistance programs generally decrease the amount a customer pays.) The law required the board to report to the

Appropriations, Energy and Technology, and Human Services committees by January 1, 2016. The law required the recommendations to consider various aspects of energy efficiency and energy assistance programs. The full report is available through the Legislative Library.

Resources

Low-Income Energy Advisory Board, “Recommendations to Improve the Implementation of Heating Assistance Programs in Connecticut,” January 2016 (available from the Legislative Library).

DSS, “[Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program Block Grant Allocation Plan, October 1, 2024 - September 30, 2025.](#)”

Low-Income Energy Advisory Board, “[Biennial Report to the Connecticut General Assembly of the Low-Income Energy and Water Advisory Board,](#)” October 2024.

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