

LIHEAP Eligibility Workers Advisory Committee
February 22, 23 2006

Those present: Jackie Vetter, Jane Backlund, Julie Hahne, Joan Fering (for Luellen Hart), Joann Heinen, Brenda Heilman, Nancy Stamness, Leisha Peterson, Ron Knutson, Linda Elstad, Robin Addington, Diane Knauf.

Wednesday, February 22

Ron opened the meeting by talking about the status of LIHEAP. He stated he does not know if there will be more funding coming for 2006 or not. There have been some rumors that there may be more. The mild winter has helped the situation. Ron handed out charts to show the difference between 2005 and 2006. Expenditures are above those for last year.

Counties are still busy at this time. Applications are about the same amount as last season. There are some vendors wanting households to pay for services up front. It was suggested that they are a little nervous this year about getting paid.

Households have been asking that their reimbursement for paid up months be sent to the vendor. This is all right to do if the household approves this. Robin cautioned that the authorization period should stay the same.

Ron brought copies of the statistics for the counties and explained that furnace cleaning and chimney cleaning are included with the emergency assistance numbers on the "Committed v. Spent" report.

Linda brought information about new worker and experienced worker training to be held in August of this year. The new worker training is August 8- 11 and experienced worker training is planned for August 15- 22 in various places throughout the state. Linda went through a list of training topics sent in by the counties and the committee helped select the most important topics.

Several asked that terminated source of income could be part of the training for experienced worker training in August. The EW's would also like to see training in verification of income especially when the household needs to get pay stubs. Other training suggested is on child support and alimony income.

Committee members suggested that the lump sum amount be changed to more than \$50. It was suggested that it be moved up to at least \$100. This was not done this year because of the budget constraints. The state office will look into this.

Water heaters are not being paid for by LIHEAP in 2006. It was suggested that all county workers should know this by the state office sending out an email or an FYI.

Vendors are charging for estimates they do for furnace replacements. LIHEAP cannot pay for the estimates.

Emergency assistance was discussed to determine what areas needed to be changed for FY 2007. Emergency assistance will be one of the training topics for experienced workers.

The furnace replacement section will be changed to reflect that a furnace should be replaced only when it was no longer cost effective to repair the furnace. The \$500 limit will be removed. Other minor changes will be made.

The Furnace Repairs (415-50-05-10-05) and Minor Repairs (415-50-05-10) sections will be combined into one section. Linda will bring this to the next meeting and it will be discussed again. The county approval maximums for this section will probably be changed.

Consumer Goods (415-50-05-20) will stay in for 2007.

Eligibility Guidelines (415-50-10-10) Some minor changes will be made in this section for transportation costs.

There have been some misunderstandings of medical verifications. Any deductions must be verified if they are over \$500. An example of this is a medical premium for insurance that is over \$500 then any deductions after that must be verified.

Thursday, February 23

Several ineligible households have been asking why depreciation is added back in to income for LIHEAP. The reason is depreciation does not cause an actual decrease in income available to pay heating costs.

Letters will be written to certain vendors letting them know that they should not ask for money upfront for repairs or replacements from households.

Linda asked if a poster for emergency assistance would now be appropriated for vendors and counties to have in their offices. Some committee members thought that these should be sent to the vendors who provide fuel.

Retirement IRA's for the self-employed were discussed because households view them as retirement accounts. The reason that they are counted is the funds are available to the household's even though there is a penalty for taking those funds out.

Mineral rights section of the manual will be rewritten. Some examples will be added to make the section more clear.

Linda indicated that in FY 2007 households who are eligible for burial accounts will be allowed to have \$5,000 in the accounts and they will not be commingled with other

accounts. Medical Assistance now allows \$5000 for burial accounts and LIHEAP will do the same.

There was much discussion about emergency assistance and how no two cases are alike. Emergency cases can be denied and households can be asked to share in the cost. A reminder: An emergency payment cannot be approved if doing so will no eliminate the emergency.

The committee asked for a list of all workers to be distributed to counties.

Meeting was adjourned and the next meeting will be May 11 and 12 at one of the local motels.