



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

PUBLIC UTILITIES REGULATORY AUTHORITY

DOCKET NO. 17-12-03RE01

PURA INVESTIGATION INTO DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM PLANNING
OF THE ELECTRIC DISTRIBUTION COMPANIES –
ENERGY AFFORDABILITY (RESIDENTIAL)

PROCEDURAL ORDER
(January 22, 2020)

Background

On October 4, 2019, the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (Authority or PURA) established the above-cited docket to investigate the topic of energy affordability for all customer classes in Connecticut (residential, commercial, and industrial) in accordance with the Framework for an Equitable Modern Grid outlined in the Interim Decision dated October 2, 2019, in Docket No. 17-12-03, PURA Investigation into Distribution System Planning of the Electric Distribution Companies. In this proceeding, the Authority seeks to: (1) identify the most impactful barriers to increased energy affordability and equity in the State and (2) identify and implement potential solutions to those barriers.

The Authority held a Public Forum technical meeting focused on residential energy affordability on November 1, 2019 (November 1st Public Forum). Based on stakeholder testimony from the November 1st Public Forum and written comments received in this proceeding in response to the Authority's October 10, 2019 and November 12, 2019 Notices of Request for Written Comments, the Authority issued an Interim Decision on December 18, 2019 (Interim Decision). In its Interim Decision, the Authority directed the electric distribution companies (EDCs, or the Companies) to implement a series of practical outreach and education measures to improve existing energy affordability programs for residential customers, particularly as the heating season began.

On January 9, 2020, the Authority held a second Public Forum technical meeting (January 9th Public Forum) to further discuss opportunities to: (1) improve coordination efforts between the Companies and state agencies to identify potential hardship customers; and (2) coordinate, streamline, and improve messaging for customers receiving financial and medical hardship protection, and identify new outreach opportunities.

Establishment of "100-Day Sprint" Initiative

The Authority appreciates the open and honest dialogue among attendees at the November 1st and January 9th Public Forums, and is encouraged by attendees' willingness to work together. In an effort to continue to foster a collaborative problem-solving approach, the Authority establishes a series of "100-Day Sprints" (Sprints) where

interested docket Participants and other stakeholders will meet to propose solutions to four discreet topics, or tracks, as outlined below. The Sprints will be staggered, with a kickoff meeting beginning the 100-day timeline. Pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. § 16-19jj, Prosecutorial staff of the Authority (PRO) will be appointed to serve as facilitators of each Sprint track provided in a subsequent Notice(s). The designated PRO will author a report with recommendations based on discussions and information presented by Sprint participants for Authority consideration. While the designated PRO staff will be encouraged to seek consensus on recommendations when possible; the Authority notes that consensus is not a prerequisite to the forthcoming reports. After consideration of the outcomes and recommendations from each 100-Day Sprint, the Authority intends to issue a decision in this proceeding to implement programmatic changes or other solutions it deems appropriate, prior to the beginning of the 2020-2021 winter heating season. The Authority finds that adopting the 100-Day Sprint model will enable a hands-on, collaborative problem-solving environment. This unique approach is appropriate given the urgent need to address issues of energy affordability raised in this proceeding to date.

Certain issues pertaining to energy assistance and utility arrearage forgiveness programs explored to date through Docket No. 18-04-25, PURA Investigation Regarding Issues Related to Uncollectible Accounts (Uncollectibles Investigation), will be exclusively addressed through this proceeding. The Uncollectibles Investigation will remain open to address other topics not covered through this docket.

Track 1: Utility-Agency Coordination on Identifying Hardship Eligibility

Objective: Track 1 Sprint participants will propose solutions to facilitate information sharing between the EDCs, the Department of Social Services (DSS), and any other relevant state agency or stakeholder group(s), to identify DSS clients who are eligible for financial hardship protection status, while adhering to customer privacy protections.

Pursuant to § 16-262c(b)(3)(B) of the General Statutes of Connecticut (Conn. Gen. Stat.), customers who receive local, state, or federal public assistance are eligible for financial hardship protection status. Track 1 Sprint participants will propose mechanism(s) to streamline the process of identifying customers receiving social service benefits in the State who are eligible to be coded for hardship status in the EDCs' billing systems. Any information-sharing agreement reached between the utilities and state agencies or stakeholder group(s) will be predicated on obtaining informed consent from the customer. Participants will examine best practices from other jurisdictions to consider the appropriate method of information-sharing that maintain customer privacy. In lieu of reaching a comprehensive information-sharing solution, the Authority may consider proposed modifications to the relevant Statutes and/or to the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies that may be required to allow for permanent coding of financial hardship for select residential customers who are on fixed incomes and whose financial situation remains unchanged.

Proposed Timeline: The Track 1 Sprint kickoff meeting will be held on **Monday, February 24, 2020 at 9:30 a.m.** at the offices of the Authority, Ten Franklin Square, New Britain, Connecticut. PRO is directed to develop a schedule of additional meeting dates, times, and locations jointly with Track 1 Sprint participants and provide notice of all such meetings in the docket. A report with recommendations shall be submitted to the Authority on or before **Wednesday, June 3, 2020.**

Track 2: Benchmarking Matrix

Objective: Track 2 Sprint participants will develop and populate a comprehensive benchmarking matrix to evaluate the Companies' energy assistance programs, policies and procedures, and associated metrics.

This sprint will focus on benchmarking the EDCs against their operating companies, as well as peer utilities in the region, to identify best practices. Track 2 Sprint participants will collect data from various sources, including, but not limited to, the Edison Electric Institute, the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, and the New England Conference of Public Utilities Commissioners. This benchmarking matrix will improve stakeholders' collective understanding of successful EDC initiatives in Connecticut, as well as identify opportunities for improvement to the Companies' existing programs, policies or procedures. The matrix may also be expanded to include metrics on non-utility energy assistance programs offered in the State.

Based on discussions at the January 9th Public Forum, the Authority requests Eversource file a blank matrix in the docket for consideration no later than **Wednesday, January 29, 2020.** This blank matrix will provide a starting point for discussion among Track 2 Sprint participants.

Proposed Timeline: The Track 2 Sprint kickoff meeting will be held on **Wednesday, March 4, 2020 at 9:30 a.m.** at the offices of the Authority. PRO is directed to develop a schedule of additional meeting dates, times, and locations jointly with Track 2 Sprint participants and provide notice of all such meetings in the docket. A report with recommendations shall be submitted to the Authority on or before **Friday, June 12, 2020.**

Track 3: Guidance for Medical Hardship Recipients

Objective: Track 3 Sprint participants will propose solutions that offer a smooth transition plan (1) for customers as they begin to receive medical hardship protection, and (2) for customers who are no longer eligible for medical hardship protection.

There is an opportunity to streamline messaging and provide greater support for residential customers who transition off of medical hardship protection status and may carry an unpaid balance on their account. These customers may be unaware of existing resources available to them, including, but not limited to, repayment plan options and energy efficiency and weatherization programs. In addition, customers who are no longer eligible to receive medical hardship protection may still be eligible for financial hardship

protection. Track 3 Sprint participants will propose outreach and education solutions that include cross-promotion of available programs. This Sprint will also examine the guidance provided to customers eligible for medical hardship, including completion of the certification of illness form through the medical web portal.

Additionally, Track 3 Sprint participants will discuss strategies for ensuring customers are aware of their rights of medical hardship pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. § 16-262c, and of customer expectations outlined in the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies § 16-3-100.

Proposed Timeline: The Track 3 Sprint kickoff meeting will be held on **Wednesday, March 17, 2020 at 9:30 a.m.** at the offices of the Authority. PRO is directed to develop a schedule of additional meeting dates, times, and locations jointly with Track 2 Sprint participants and provide notice of all such meetings in the docket. A report with recommendations shall be submitted to the Authority on or before **Thursday, June 25, 2020.**

Track 4: Targeted Marketing Campaign

Objective: Track 4 Sprint participants will provide guidance on improvements to the Companies' education and outreach materials to be used in a targeted marketing campaign to promote energy assistance programs and other resources available to residential customers who experience difficulty paying their energy bills in full.

The Authority will issue a subsequent Notice in this proceeding directing the EDCs to jointly issue a Request for Proposals to contract with a marketing campaign specialist to work with the EDCs and Sprint participants to develop materials and a marketing campaign through this Sprint to submit to the Authority for approval. Track 4 Sprint participants will work collaboratively to provide input on proposed messaging content, outreach channels, and a targeted marketing campaign. The fact sheets and sample customer service representative scripts filed by the Companies on January 17, 2020, pursuant to Order Nos. 3 and 4 in the Interim Decision, will provide a starting point for further discussion among Track 4 Sprint participants.

Proposed Timeline: The Authority anticipates that a kickoff meeting will be held in May 2020, and will announce such meeting in a follow-up Notice. PRO is directed to develop a schedule of additional meeting dates, times, and locations jointly with Track 4 Sprint participants and provide notice of all such meetings in the docket. A report with recommendations shall be submitted to the Authority on or before 100 days following the kickoff meeting for the Track 4 Sprint.

Participation in the 100-Day Sprint Tracks

All members of the public are invited to participate in one or more of the four 100-Day Sprint Tracks. The Authority encourages participation from docket Participants and other stakeholders who have engaged in this proceeding to date, as well as the following

stakeholders with relevant expertise: the nine Community Action Agencies in Connecticut¹; The Connecticut Association for Community Action; and United Way (2-1-1).

The dates, times, and locations of all working sessions will be open to the public and noticed in the docket. In an effort to encourage broad participation, the Authority encourages that PRO aim to schedule meetings at various locations to be hosted by participating stakeholders, in addition to meetings held at PURA's offices.

To participate in one more of the 100-Day sprint tracks, contact the PURA case coordinator assigned to this docket, Laura Lupoli, who can be reached at laura.lupoli@ct.gov, or (860) 827-2631.

Dated at New Britain, Connecticut, this 22nd day of January 2020.

PUBLIC UTILITIES REGULATORY AUTHORITY

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeffrey R. Gaudiosi', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jeffrey R. Gaudiosi, Esq.
Executive Secretary

(GBC)

Notice filed with the Secretary of the State on January 22, 2020.

¹ Action for Bridgeport Community Development, Inc.; The Access Community Action Agency; Community Action Agency of New Haven, Inc.; The Community Action Agency of Western Connecticut, Inc.; Community Renewal Team, Inc.; Human Resources Agency of New Britain, Inc.; New Opportunities, Inc.; Thames Valley Council for Community Action, Inc.; and Training, Education and Manpower, Inc.