



September 9, 2024

To: All Parties of Record at Docket No. M-2023-3038944

RE: Citizens Electric Company and Wellsboro Electric Company – Notification of Participation in LIHEAP Data Sharing

Overview

On June 13, 2024, the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (Commission) entered an Order (June 2024 Order) in *2023 Review of All Jurisdictional Fixed Utilities' Universal Service Programs*, Docket No. M-2023-3038944, (*2023 Review of Universal Service Programs*), establishing terms and conditions under which an energy public utility may document its election to participate in the Department of Human Services' (DHS) Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) data sharing.¹ The terms and conditions articulated in the June 2024 Order included a temporary and partial waiver of limited provisions in approved universal service and energy conservation plans (USECPs) for energy public utilities to facilitate their use of LIHEAP household data shared with them by DHS. The PUC encouraged but did not require an energy public utility to participate in the DHS LIHEAP data sharing. The PUC required energy public utilities to file and serve a letter at its USECP docket(s) indicating its plans and timelines if it chose to participate in the DHS LIHEAP data sharing. June 2024 Order at 2, OP #3.

On July 30, 2024, Citizens Electric Company (Citizens) and Wellsboro Electric Company (Wellsboro) filed a joint Letter (Citizens and Wellsboro Letter) at Docket No. M-2023-3038944, responding to the June 2024 Order. The joint Letter confirms that Citizens and Wellsboro will participate in DHS' LIHEAP data sharing and identifies the public utilities' planned compliance with the terms and conditions in the June 2024 Order, as summarized below:

Use the LIHEAP data to conduct individualized universal service outreach as soon as possible (ideally monthly) after receiving the household's data from DHS. June 2024 Order at 3.

Response: Citizens and Wellsboro report that they will use the LIHEAP household data to facilitate outreach when a customer becomes payment troubled and may qualify for its hardship fund program. Citizens and Wellsboro Letter at 1.

Use a simplified/streamlined process for households to enroll in universal service programs and recertify in the customer assistance program (CAP) if the income and household data was received by DHS in the prior 12 months and/or the current or prior LIHEAP program year, without requiring additional applications or documentation. June 2024 Order at 3.

¹ The Commission established these terms and conditions based on its review of the recommendations of the Universal Service Working Group (USWG). See [USWG Final Report](#), Docket No. M-2023-3038944, at 73-83.

Response: Citizens and Wellsboro only administer Hardship Fund programs. They report that their Hardship Fund programs are managed by outside agencies, such as Dollar Energy Fund, the Salvation Army, churches, and other community organizations. Citizens and Wellsboro state that they will not be able to share the LIHEAP household data with these outside agencies without the customer’s consent. Citizens and Wellsboro Letter at 1.

Discuss its plans for individualized outreach and simplified/streamlined enrollment with its respective Universal Service Advisory Group/Committee (USAG or USAC). June 2024 Order at 3.

Response: Citizens and Wellsboro did not address this provision from the June 2024 Order. Neither public utility has a USAG or USAC.

Send a communication to each auto-recertified CAP participant based on LIHEAP data with their updated CAP bill amount (if applicable) and instructions on how to contact the energy public utility to provide additional updates on household income/size if the household information has changed since completing the LIHEAP application. June 2024 Order at 3-4.

Response: Citizens and Wellsboro did not address this provision from the June 2024 Order, as neither electric utility currently administers a CAP.

Provide educational materials to inform customers about the purpose and effect of the checkbox on the 2024-2025 LIHEAP application which will grant permission for DHS to share this information with energy public utilities. Include a timeline for when the materials will be provided to customers. June 2024 Order at 4.

Response: Citizens and Wellsboro report they are willing to distribute any PUC or DHS educational materials regarding the purpose and effect of the data sharing checkbox on the LIHEAP application and will also post their information on their websites. Citizens and Wellsboro Letter at 2.

Identify any provisions in the energy public utility’s current and proposed USECP that need to be waived or added to incorporate the data sharing conditions. June 2024 Order at 4.

Response: Citizens and Wellsboro did not address this provision from the June 2024 Order, as neither electric public utility currently maintains a USECP.²

Discussion

To date, no protests or other responsive pleadings have been filed relative to the Citizens and Wellsboro Letter. The PUC directed staff in the Bureau of Consumer Services and the Law Bureau to review the letters filed in response to the June 2024 Order. Having reviewed the Citizens and Wellsboro Letter, staff finds that Citizens' and Wellsboro's joint responses are generally consistent with the June 2024 Order, noting that several of the terms and conditions in the June 2024 Order are not applicable to those public utilities.

Conclusion

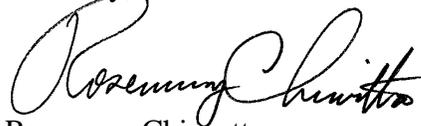
PUC staff finds Citizens and Wellsboro each to be substantially compliant with the June 2024 Order. No further action by Citizens or Wellsboro in regard to the terms and conditions established by the June 2024 Order is required at this time.

The determinations in this Secretarial Letter have been made by PUC staff under authority delegated by the Commission. Parties have the right to seek reconsideration of this staff action. Parties may seek reconsideration of these directives by petitioning the Commission within 20 days after service of this Secretarial Letter. See 52 Pa. Code § 5.44 (relating to petitions for appeal from actions of the staff).

² 52 Pa. Code § 54.77 allows electric utilities with less than 60,000 residential accounts to provide general information about their universal service programs instead of the full universal service reporting requirements, including USECPs. As of 2022, both Citizens and Wellsboro each reported having less than 6,000 residential accounts. See [2022 Report on Universal Service and Collections Performance](#) at 82. Both Citizens and Wellsboro provide information on their respective Hardship Fund programs through an annual survey conducted by the PUC's Bureau of Consumer Services (BCS).

If you have any questions, please contact BCS Energy Policy Manager Joseph Magee at jmagee@pa.gov.

Sincerely



Rosemary Chiavetta
Secretary

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