



September 9, 2024

To: All Parties of Record at Docket Nos. M-2018-3003177, M-2020-3021343, and M-2023-3038944

RE: Peoples Natural Gas and Peoples Gas 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, Peoples Natural Gas Company LLC (PNGC) and Peoples Gas Company LLC (PGC) (collectively Peoples) filed a letter (Peoples Letter) at the 2019-2024 USECP (2019 USECP) dockets, Docket Nos. M-2018-3003177 and M-2020-3021343, confirming that Peoples will participate in DHS' LIHEAP data sharing and identifying its 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: Peoples reports that it already conducts outreach via telephone and/or email to customers not enrolled in its Customer Assistance Program (CAP) who have received LIHEAP to gain their verbal information and permission to enroll their account in CAP based on the LIHEAP household information received from DHS. Peoples also states that it will work with its Universal Service Advisory Group (USAG) to further modify or streamline this process. Peoples Letter at 1.

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.

Use a simplified/streamlined process for households to enroll in universal service programs and recertify in 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.

Response: Peoples reports that it already accepts LIHEAP participation as proof of income eligibility and does not require LIHEAP recipients to provide income documentation. These customers provide household income amounts verbally to complete their application. Peoples states that it will work with its USAG to streamline this process for the LIHEAP household information received from DHS. Peoples 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: Peoples reports that it will consult with its USAG on October 23, 2024, on its plans to streamline its CAP enrollment process. Peoples Letter at 1.

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: Peoples reports that its CAP recertification will continue to occur on the customer's scheduled date but that it will use receipt of LIHEAP to recertify the customer. For the first year, Peoples plans to generate manual letters to customers regarding its use of LIHEAP data to complete the recertification process. Peoples states that automating this process will take time and consideration. Peoples Letter at 2.

Provide educational materials^[2] 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: Peoples reports that it is currently planning its Fall outreach campaign to promote LIHEAP and that information regarding the LIHEAP checkbox will be included on the outreach materials and on the Peoples website. Peoples Letter at 1.

² The educational language template was designed by the USWG. See USWG Final Report at 84 85.

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: Peoples reports that it may need to change the description in its 2019 USECP of how customers are contacted and enrolled in CAP after receipt of a LIHEAP grant. The language currently reads: “Upon contact, a customer may be enrolled in CAP without providing income documentation if he/she has received a LIHEAP payment within the current or most recent LIHEAP program year.”³ Peoples states that it will consult with its USAG as it develops the LIHEAP data sharing enrollment process to determine if modification to this language is required. Peoples Letter at 2.

Discussion

To date, no protests or other responsive pleadings have been filed relative to the Peoples 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 Peoples Letter, staff finds that Peoples’s responses are generally consistent with the June 2024 Letter, with the following exceptions.

First, Peoples does not address how or whether it will use the LIHEAP household data to enroll customers in non-CAP universal service programs (*e.g.*, Low Income Usage Reduction Program (LIURP), Hardship Fund). Peoples is encouraged to use the LIHEAP household data to determine a household’s eligibility for all of its universal service programs, not just CAP.

Second, Peoples reports that “receipt of LIHEAP” will be used to recertify customers for CAP. It is not clear whether “receipt of LIHEAP” refers to receipt of a CAP customer’s LIHEAP grant or receipt of the CAP customer’s LIHEAP data and grant.⁴ Peoples may receive LIHEAP grants for customers who do not give DHS consent to share their household information. In those instances, Peoples should continue to follow its current recertification process, as specified in its 2019 USECP,⁵ and request verification of household income as necessary.

Finally, it is not clear whether Peoples proposes to accept all household income data provided from DHS within the timeframe established in the June 2024 Order. Peoples 2019 USECP states that it accepts household income from the past 30 days or 12 months – or a LIHEAP grant from the current or most recent program year – to determine eligibility for CAP.⁶ The LIHEAP household income received from DHS may exceed this timeframe. Peoples is reminded that the temporary and partial waiver of household income timeframes granted through the June 2024

³ See PNGC’s 2019-2024 USECP, Docket No. M-2018-3003177, and PGC’s 2019-2024 USECP, Docket No. M-2020-3021343 (filed jointly on June 13, 2022, and referred to collectively as Peoples 2019 USECP), at 10.

⁴ For the 2024-2025 LIHEAP season, DHS will only share the LIHEAP household data with public utilities that are issued a LIHEAP grant.

⁵ See Peoples 2019 USECP at 13.

⁶ See Peoples 2019 USECP at 10.

Order extends to income received by DHS in the prior 12 months and/or the current or prior LIHEAP program year.

Conclusion

PUC staff finds Peoples to be substantially compliant with the June 2024 Order, with the exceptions noted above. Peoples is encouraged to discuss its proposed USECP changes with its USAG. No further action by Peoples in regard to the terms and conditions of 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).

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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