

# Draft meeting notes

Wednesday September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021, 9:00 – 4:00 PM

Webex Virtual Meeting

## Board Member Attendance:

Present: Shiroma, Delgado-Olson, Stamas, Castaneda, Watts, Wimbley, Medina, Irwin, Castilone, Lim

Absent: Linam

### 1. Welcome and Introductions

Board Chair Delgado-Olson opened the meeting of the Low Income Oversight Board (LIOB) at approximately 9:00 AM. Commissioner Shiroma followed by providing her opening remarks, which included a summary of the meeting's contents and noting the end of the energy disconnections moratorium on September 30<sup>th</sup>. Commissioner Shiroma noted that Commissioners Houk and Guzman-Aceves would also be in attendance during part of the meeting and Commissioner Houk provided brief welcoming remarks. Board Member introductions followed.

### 2. Approval of the June 17, 2021 Meeting Minutes – Action Item

Board Vice-Chair Stamas moved to approve the minutes from the June 17<sup>th</sup> meeting and Board Member Medina seconded the motion. The LIOB approved the minutes with Members Shiroma, Delgado-Olson, Stamas, Watts, Wimbley, Medina, Irwin, Castilone, and Lim voting in favor of approving the minutes and Board Member Castaneda abstaining.

### 3. Public Comment

Kathleen Monahan from Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) announced two open Request for Proposals (RFPs) for Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to contract to provide services for 2022 and 2023. Ms. Monahan noted that these contract announcements are distinct from Energy Savings Assistance (program) provider programs.

Ana Solorio of Community Housing Opportunities Corporation (CHOC) and the Energy Efficiency Council provided comment to raise concerns about the ESA transition, which made significant changes to the program. She expressed concern for the aggressive timeline adopted and concern for the impact on the low-income community. Ms. Solorio encouraged the Board to work with the CPUC Energy Division (ED) and the investor-owned utilities (IOUs) to make sure that the transition is a thoughtful rollout and ensure that no one is left out during this transition. Ms. Solorio also expressed support for the recent gubernatorial proclamation on peak load and noted that the ESA can support that goal. Related to that proclamation, Ms.

Solorio shared disappointment in PG&E for dropping interior LED lights from program, as she sees that measure as contributing to the peak load goals.

David Ortiz of the Ortiz Group provided public comment. The Ortiz Group is part of the low-income section of the Technology and Equipment for Clean Heating (TECH) Clean California program. This program is accelerating the adoption of clean space and water heating and increasing the number of these technologies in low-income homes. The Ortiz group is working on training and workforce development, changing permit process, and other activities. Mr. Ortiz shared that he would like to opportunity to give a presentation on work they are doing at a future LIOB meeting.

Anthony Gilbert of Salco Better Energy commented to reiterate Ana Solorio's comments on the ESA program and expressed concerns about the budget and contractors.

There were no Spanish commenters on the Spanish Verizon phone line at this time.

Board Member Medina asked if it would be possible to note in the Webex attendance list which attendees were members of the public, utility staff, CPUC staff, etc. and asked if it would be possible to include any Spanish phone line attendees in the meeting minutes.

#### 4. Comment from Community Based Organizations

Representatives from emPower, Kings Community Action Organization, and the Utility Debt Coalition were in attendance to provide an overview of their respective organizations. Board Member Watts introduced Ben Russak of the Liberty Hill Foundation and the emPower Program, which consists of the Liberty Hill Foundation, Latino/a Roundtable, Pacoima Beautiful, Redeemer Community Partnership, and the Social Justice Learning Institute.

At this point in the meeting, Commissioner Guzman Aceves joined.

In response to the emPower presentation, Board Member Medina noted the importance to see the numbers of participants in the various emPower programs and would like to keep in contact with these organizations. Board Member Medina would be interested in how connected participants feel to these programs and what challenges they are facing.

Board Member Castaneda shared that he was impressed with this model and would like to connect with Ben Russak after this meeting. Board Member Castaneda noted the commitment of the various CBO participants and that this model could be replicated in other parts of the state.

Commissioner Guzman Aceves asked if the participants could share the support they receive from utilities. Mr. Russak noted that they received funds from Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) and Southern California Edison (SCE), the latter being from their philanthropy section rather than a program budget. Mr. Russak shared that the program is looking for a more stable source of funding going forward.

Board Vice-Chair Stamas asked about what additional support is needed, what barriers the group is facing, and if this model can be replicated. Mr. Russak answered that Liberty Hill is working on developing a model to replicate in other areas. The biggest challenges are technical assistance and support from the agencies that emPower is supporting, including tracking information from customers referred to different programs.

Board Chair Delgado-Olson introduced Jeff Garner of King's County Community Action Agency (KCCAO). After the presentation, the Board Chair emphasized the importance of coordinating assistance programs and complimented KCCAO on their inclusivity of so many social safety nets.

Board Member Wimbley asked how the demand for utility assistance has changed in the past few years and whether there are opportunities for more collaboration. Mr. Garner answered that in the beginning of the pandemic there was a pause in need for utility assistance because of the actions the CPUC took. However, later there was a high volume of assistance needs due to accrued high bills. Mr. Garner also shared that workplace transitions of staff in key positions have affected the ability to provide services.

Commissioner Shiroma noted the very low level of the Federal Poverty Levels (FPL) and that there is new legislation which raises the eligibility of the ESA program from 200 to 250% of FPL.

Staff from different advocates in the Utility Debt Coalition shared the work that they have been doing in response to increases in debt as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and asked for the LIOB's support in advocating for statewide debt relief measures. Chair Delgado-Olson noted that agenda item 8, update on Customer Arrearage Assistance, would be an opportunity for utilities to respond to this topic. In terms of utility debt being a reoccurring item on the agenda, the LIOB is planning to make that an ongoing item under the reports from IOUs.

Board Member Medina would encourage the utility debt coalition to consider having a consumer ambassador to be able to attend full quarterly meetings because there is a lot of information shared at Board meetings that all relates to low-income assistance.

Commissioner Guzman Aceves thanked the group for their presentation and noted that the COVID arrears proceeding is still open. That proceeding is an opportunity to investigate what is still needed, including how IOUs can support CBOs in engaging with customers in need. The Commissioner also shared that while the Water disconnections moratorium was extended until the end of the year and Energy was not, all eligible energy customers will be automatically enrolled in payment plans to make sure there are no immediate disconnections.

Commissioner Shiroma shared that for the Lifeline Program, the federal communications commission has extended the moratorium on renewals until the end of 2021.

Board Vice-Chair Stamas noted that there are questions for the utilities in the afternoon especially in regard to the gaps in both debt relief assistance, and the timing of the disconnections moratorium before the distribution of assistance fund.

## 5. Environmental and Social Justice (ESJ) Action Plan Update

At this point in the meeting, the Board Chair announced a rescheduling of the agenda to proceed with item 5, then items 7 and 8, and fitting in item 6 later in the meeting.

Monica Palmeira, of the CPUC News & Outreach Office, shared the status of the ESJ Action Plan update to be released in October.

Board Member Medina commented on the importance of both encouraging customers to reduce energy usage for bill savings, but also for helping the environment.

Board Chair Delgado-Olson noted that the revised ESJ Action Plan, once released, could be the subject of a future subcommittee meeting.

## 6. Water Updates

Commissioner Shiroma introduced State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) Member Laurel Firestone. Board Member Firestone provided an update on a new program that will provide relief funds for water bill debt.

Commissioner Shiroma asked what the deadline was for utilities to apply for this program is. Board Member Firestone answered that the deadline is December 6<sup>th</sup> so that funds can be distributed to water companies by the end of the year. Water companies then need to credit customer accounts within 60 days.

Board Member Medina expressed concern about small municipal water providers applying for these funds so that community members are not denied access to assistance. Board Member Firestone responded that the water board is focusing on communications with water systems and making sure as many systems as possible apply.

Viet Truong of the CPUC Water Division followed Board Member Firestone with updates on Senate Bill 222 and statewide drought conditions.

Board Member Medina responded to the updates on the state drought status and the impact on communities that rely on groundwater, noting that they may run out of water or not be able to meet the cost of obtaining water.

At this point in the meeting, the Board adjourned for lunch.

## 7. Customer Arrearage Assistance

Board Chair Delgado-Olson reconvened the Board at approximately 1:00 PM. Commissioner Shiroma introduced this item on the agenda and thanked the Board for serving as a public forum for a large utility issue. Staff from SCE, PG&E, San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E), and SoCalGas (SCG) provided a joint presentation on customer marketing and outreach on payment plans.

Commissioner Shiroma commented that around 50% of statewide arrearages are held by customers not on the California Alternative Rates for Energy (CARE) program. Commissioner Shiroma asked if SCE was including information on enrolling in CARE or the Family Electric Rate Assistance (FERA) program in the letters being sent out regarding payment plans. SCE answered that they are not but could explore that idea.

Commissioner Shiroma asked PG&E if the radio ads included Spanish language radio as well. PG&E answered that they would have to provide a response later.

Board Member Wimbley asked about the target mailing that included Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) information and what results the IOUs have seen, as well as if the IOUs are coordinate with local service providers (LSP). PGE answered that they have seen strong response to LIHEAP and are working with the LSPs.

Board Member Medina noted the SoCalGas presentation and the format of the marketing for being customer friendly. Board Member Medina asked for PG&E to include more data in their summary similar to the other utilities.

Commissioner Guzman Aceves mentioned the morning presentations from CBOs who are working to help customers with debt and that receive charitable funding from IOUs. The Commissioner asked if the utilities are currently funding CBOs through this marketing education and outreach program. SCE answered that they contract with CBOs for customer outreach on a variety of things including pandemic related relief. The Commissioner responded that some CBOs stated that they need more reliable funding. SCE answered that they have tiers of CBO relationships, and the several tiers of CBOs receive funding based on the marketing they promote. PGE answered that they have paid outreach grants specific to COVID-19 protections, financial assistance, and support. Additionally, PGE has an RFP open for more funding sources for CBOs as well. SDG&E has a network of 200 CBOs in their Energy Partner Network who are funded based on the programs that they agree to promote via an annual memorandum of understanding (MOU). SCG also shared that they have a network of CBOs that are trained on all customer assistance programs offerings.

Chair Delgado-Olson asked about the Arrearage Management Plan (AMP) and if there is separate outreach for that in addition the regular payment plans. PG&E answered that they have separate AMP communications target to AMP eligible customers, including in CARE/FERA certification communications. SCE and SGD&E answered similarly.

Board Member Castaneda remarked on the strategy of targeting eligible customers first and also affirmed Board Member Medina's previous comments on the need to use customer friendly language to alleviate debt stress. Board Member Castaneda also commented that ESA providers are working with customers directly and it makes sense for them to be enabled to communicate with customers about these assistance programs as well.

Board Vice-Chair Stamas had a question about timing as it relates to disconnections. She asked if a customer misses a payment, how soon are they eligible for disconnection? SCE answered that there is a web of safety nets available to prevent immediate disconnection. For the payment plan, they would not be removed until the third missed payment. Customers also have CAPP assistance available to them and those that are included in that application cannot be disconnected. Once the CAPP funding is applied, the customer is protected for 90 days. The Vice-Chair followed up by asking if some of that information should be included in customer outreach. SCE answered that they are balancing messaging to promote the best customer behaviors and avoid unnecessary stress. SDG&E also answered that the payment plan and CAPP are not an either or, so some customers can get benefits of both.

Commissioner Shiroma suggested moving to agenda item #10 next in order to discuss CAPP. The Commissioner also remarked on the need to increase the amount of marketing quickly to ease customer anxiety and make sure customers don't compromise their financial situation to pay off their utility bills right away for fear of disconnection. Commissioner Shiroma noted the existing gaps, such as FERA eligible customers, who are unenrolled in the program and may be under enrolled in other assistance programs.

Commissioner Houk underscored comments from other speakers on the availability of other channels for getting information to customers.

Board Chair Delgado-Olson asked what type of data is available to show if these programs are working between now and the December quarterly board meeting. Commissioner Guzman Aceves shared that there is some data that will be reported monthly via the Disconnections proceeding. The Board Chair closed his comments by noting the importance of working with Social Service Agencies to also target customers.

Board Member Lim suggested that this topic could be continued at a subcommittee meeting. Board Chair Delgado-Olson agreed. Commissioner Shiroma shared that there might be opportunities for a Commission Committee meeting.

Commissioner Guzman Aceves shared that there are still opportunities in the COVID arrears proceeding to also continue improving these efforts.

## 8. Coordination Report on Low Income Weatherization Program (LIWP) & California Arrearage Payment Program (CAPP)

Board Member Wimbley provided an overview of the CAPP, including the amount of funding available, the customers that are eligible, and how the process will work.

At this point in the meeting, the Board moved to item 12.

## 9. Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Updates

Board Chair Delgado Olson provided a brief update on the efforts of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

The Board Chair proposed postponing agenda item #9 to a subcommittee meeting in the interest of time. Board Member Lim responded that the part of agenda item #9, summer reliability, is timely and could be included for this meeting.

The Board then proceeded to item #11.

## 10. Disadvantaged Communities Advisory Group (DACAG) Update

Commissioner Shiroma shared that the Chairs of the advisory groups for Lifeline and the Disadvantaged Communities Advisory Group (DACAG) met this quarter to begin discussing share priorities. Following that immediate meeting, the LIOB invited Stephanie Chen of the DACAG present a high-level overview of their advisory group and priorities.

The Board proceeded to agenda item #6.

## 11. Energy Division Update

Kapil Kulkarni, of the CPUC Energy Division, provided updates on the large IOUs ESA/CARE/FERA program cycle, the Small Multi-Jurisdictional Utilities ESA/CARE proceeding, Summer Reliability proceeding, and the Low Income Needs Assessment (LINA).

Board Member Irwin asked if the 2021-2026 decision is effective or if it is still ongoing. Mr. Kulkarni answered that it was effective upon voting out on June 3 and is now in the implementation phase.

Board Member Castaneda shared his concerns with the timing of the ESA Working Group convening subsequent to the solicitation timeline. Board Member Castaneda also expressed that the immediate implementation and solicitation would affect the ESA workforce and asked why this is the way this is occurring. Mr. Kulkarni answered that the decision required an open solicitation process that allows for both existing and new contractors to participate in bidding for the program. Board Member Castaneda suggested that this topic be included at another meeting in order for it to be fully explained to the Board as soon as possible. He also noted the disconnection between the single family and multifamily ESA timelines.

Board Chair Delgado-Olson responded that the high priority concerns are on reduction in workforce and capacity . In order to have more time to discuss, the ESA solicitation timeline could be included on a subcommittee agenda.

Commissioner Shiroma shared that part of the solicitation is a pilot program for a new model. Board Member Castaneda responded that his comments were not referring to the pilot program, but the single-family core ESA program.

Board Member Watts shared that she received a solicitation for both the pilot and the main ESA program. There is likely confusion about the timeline, and this will affect the stability of the ESA workforce.

Commissioner Shiroma responded that it is important to make sure there is no confusion and ensure continuity. Mr. Kulkarni answered that the intent of sharing solicitation plans in advance was to reduce confusion by giving the contractor network advanced notice on how the program will be billed out. Mr. Kulkarni also shared that budgets will remain stable throughout the cycle, the multifamily Common Area Measure (CAM) program will transition to the new multifamily program, and that the pilots would begin after the beginning of the new ESA program.

Board Member Castaneda asked Board Member Watts for clarification on whether her understanding in the RFP was that it was for 3 months of the ESA program. Board Member Watts clarified that the confusion was more around the different programs. Board Member Castaneda again emphasized the need to take time on this topic to prevent workforce disruptions. Board Chair Delgado-Olson stated that this topic would be an agenda item at a subcommittee meeting.

In response to the Energy Division update on summer reliability, Commissioner Shiroma shared that the Commission is pursuing a holistic effort to increase summer reliability.

## 12. Joint Investor-Owned Utilities Status Reports

In the interest of time, the joint IOU status updates presentation was reduced to the section on the IOU response to the Governor's proclamation on summer energy usage.

Board Member Medina shared her own experiences in using smart thermostats and energy efficiency measures and asked if it would be possible to add reminders for households to maintain their air filters.

## 13. Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Updates

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) did not meet during this quarter.

## 14. Subcommittee Reports

The Low Income Energy Assistance Programs (LIEAP) subcommittee met on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021 to discuss the IOU compliance filings on ESA measures.

The Water & Climate Change subcommittee met on August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021 with attendance of Commissioner Houk. There were updates from water companies on customer assistance and drought measures, as well as a presentation from the National Weather Service on their heat index data.

The Legislative and Low Income Needs Assessment (LINA) subcommittees did not meet this quarter.

Board Chair Delgado-Olson noted that the LIEAP and Water & Climate Change committees would be meeting shortly to discuss some of the follow-up issues identified in this quarterly meeting.

## 15. Wrap Up & Closing Remarks

Commissioner Shiroma shared closing remarks and noted the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Board. A future in-person celebration is being planned for this anniversary.

Board Member Medina acknowledged the 20 years of the Board and would like to recognize prior board members. Board Member Medina also noted that she provided public comment at the last CPUC Voting meeting and was impressed by the volume of passionate public commenters.

Board Member Castaneda recognized Senate Bill 756 and thanked the Dolores Huerta Foundation for supporting this bill. Board Member Castaneda noted that this bill passed unanimously in the legislature and will significantly help the low-income community.

Board Chair Delgado-Olson closed the meeting by thanking the presenters, the Commissioners in attendance, the utility staff, and all other attendees.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:00 PM.