

Draft meeting notes

Thursday July 21, 10:00 AM – 4:15 PM

Webex Virtual Meeting

Board Member Attendance:

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

Absent: None

Meeting Recording: https://www.adminmonitor.com/ca/cpuc/public_forum/20220721/

Meeting Presentations: <https://liob.cpuc.ca.gov/previous-liob-meetings/>

Please note: Agenda Items are listed in the order they were discussed. Some items were discussed out of numerical order.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Board Chair Delgado-Olson opened the meeting of the Low Income Oversight Board (LIOB) at approximately 10:00 AM. Commissioner Shiroma provided opening remarks and introduced the newest appointed member, John Tang. Board Member Tang represents the investor owned water utilities and is the Vice President of Regulatory Affairs and Government Relations for San Jose Water. The Commissioner thanked the board for providing feedback on the Clean Energy Financing (CEF) proposals (R. 20-08-022) at a June subcommittee meeting. Board Member introductions followed.

2. Approval of the March 24, 2022 Meeting Minutes – Action Item

Commissioner Shiroma moved to approve the [minutes from the March meeting](#) and Board Member Castaneda seconded the motion. The LIOB approved the minutes, with Board Member Tang abstaining and all other members voting to approve.

3. Public Comment

Steve Castaneda of PRM Consulting, provided comment. PRM is a California Alternative Rates for Energy (CARE) contractor for Southern California Gas (SoCalGas) and is working on increasing enrollment in the Family Electric Rates Assistance (FERA) program. Mr. Castaneda commented that there are opportunities to increase optimization for FERA enrollment and the board could facilitate discussion among stakeholders on this topic.

Irina Krishpinovich of the Ortiz Group shared information on Clean Tech California, a program which leverages funds to provide electrification and energy efficiency measures to income

qualified households. The Ortiz Group recently hosted train-the-trainer sessions for Energy Savings Assistance (ESA) contractors that focused on training techniques and technical assistance in installing heat pump water heaters. Clean Tech California and the Ortiz Group will be launching pilots in Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) and Southern California Edison (SCE) territory, in which additional funds will be available to cover remediation measures needed for the installation of electric heat pump water heaters. These pilots are scheduled to launch in quarter four of 2022.

Prachi Kohli of the National Diversity Coalition provided comment. The advocacy of the National Diversity Coalition has led to millions of ratepayer dollars saved. Additionally, the National Diversity Coalition has been involved in outreach for CARE and FERA. Ms. Kohli commented on the Community Help and Awareness of Natural Gas and Electric Services (CHANGES) presentation and expressed a desire to partner to do more outreach in low-income, minority, and hard-to-reach communities.

Jennifer Capitolo of the California Water Association provided an update on the low income water decision – D.21-07-029. One requirement of the decision is an annual Customer Assistance Program (CAP) and CARE data sharing meeting. This year’s meeting was held on July 8 and discussed ways to improve low income data sharing and the process of quarterly data sharing.

Board Member Castaneda inquired about recording the public comments and whether the Board had the ability to address them during the meeting. Commissioner Shiroma responded that some of the comments were just status updates. For example, the water decision happened last year, so more information can be found in that proceeding. Commissioner Shiroma also shared that Faith Bautista at the National Diversity Council interviewed her and in that interview she was able to highlight the CARE, FERA, and ESA programs. Board Chair Delgado-Olson responded that the rest of the agenda overlaps with the comments brought up today.

Board Member Medina commented that she has received comments from an individual in the Bay Area that she wanted to bring to the full board. This caller has concerns about water heater measures provided by ESA. Gillian Weaver of Energy Division responded that staff would follow-up on this specific complaint.

Commissioner Shiroma acknowledged Mr. Castaneda’s comment about low FERA enrollment and noted that the investor owned utility (IOU) standing reports show low enrollment in the program.

Leuwam Tesfai, Deputy Executive Director for Energy and Climate Policy at the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), introduced herself to the LIOB in this role. Previously, Ms. Tesfai worked with the Board as the Chief Advisor to Commissioner Shiroma. Ms. Tesfai shared that her guiding principles are reliability, affordability, safety, and reducing greenhouse gases. She

commented on her goal of increasing equity focus in energy programs. To close, she thanked the board for their partnership with the CPUC and for serving the low income community.

4. Community Help and Awareness of Natural Gas and Electric Services (CHANGES)

Ravinder Mangat of the CPUC's News & Outreach Division provided the [biannual update on the Community Help and Awareness of Natural Gas and Electric Services \(CHANGES\) Program](#).

Casey McFall of Milestone Consulting LLC and Anni Chung of Self Help for Elderly were available to answer questions about the program.

Board Member Castaneda commented that it would be helpful for a breakdown of locales in addition to the reported data. The CHANGES report highlights a growing problem rising assistance need. Mr. Castaneda elaborated that if a particular locale is an area of focus, in connection with need, there could be proactive action to try and address the situation before it worsens. Board Member Castaneda offered the Low Income Energy Assistance Programs (LIEAP) subcommittee to be a venue to discuss how to improve the nexus to better target outreach and dollars.

Board Member Medina noted the low number of disputes due to the disconnections moratorium and that many citizens may be in peril of disconnection as soon as disconnections take effect. She noted the extreme weather conditions, notably heat and drought, that make using power and water critical and expensive. Mr. Mangat responded that although disputes are low, there are still a number of ongoing issues, such as rising bills. Casey McFall shared that CHANGES has seen a lot of need in the Central Valley historically. Unfortunately, CHANGES is not authorized to assist with water issues. Ms. McFall commented that the underlying issue is rate increases, with assistance programs acting as a bandage rather than a solution.

Board Member Castaneda responded to the discussion by mentioning the importance of the low income assistance program workforce and their critical ability to provide education and community support.

Board Member Tang asked if the shut off moratorium ended for energy and whether CHANGES anticipates more call volume when that happens. Mr. Mangat answered that it has ended but disconnections have not yet resumed. CHANGES is prepared for an increased volume of disputes.

Board Member Castilone asked about the outreach activities and media placement, specifically if the media was just informational or whether it conveyed customer stories. Ms. McFall answered that media is not intended to be advertising and usually consists of interviews in print, radio, and television media. The media placement is always specific and includes community based organization (CBO) contact information.

Board Vice-Chair Stamas asked about the customers falling off their payment plans and whether the California Arrearage Payment Program (CAPP) funds were either not sufficient or

being provided to customers correctly. Ms. McFall answered that many people weren't aware they were receiving CAPP, or that their balance is larger than the CAPP assistance could help them with.

11. Subcommittee Reports – Low Income Energy Assistance Programs & Legislative Subcommittee Recommendations

At this point in the meeting, the Board Chair Delgado-Olson moved to item 11, [Low Income Energy Assistance Programs \(LIEAP\) & Legislative Subcommittee Recommendations](#). Board Vice-Chair Stamas, as chair of the Legislative Subcommittee, summarized bills of interest to the Board, including those that the Legislative Subcommittee voted to support at their May subcommittee meeting, and those that the Board could vote on supporting at today's meeting. The bills supported by the Board would be communicated in a letter to the Commission. This letter could also include the Board's position overall on public purpose surcharges and their connection to bill increases.

In regard to Assembly Bill 2419, Board Member Tang asked what the need was and whether this was allocated in a way that non-disadvantaged communities would benefit as well. Board Vice-Chair Stamas responded that she was uncertain which specific communities would benefit, but that 50% of the funding would be available for non-disadvantaged communities.

Board Member Castaneda asked if there was a list of supporters for AB 2419. Vice-Chair Stamas said the supporters were environmental groups and those who were opposed were water utilities. Mr. Tang clarified that the California Water Association, which represents investor owned water utilities is not opposed, but the Association of California Water Agencies, which represents municipal water utilities, is opposed.

In regard to Senate Bill 1020, Vice-Chair Stamas facilitated discussion on proposed amendments to the bill language that the Board could support.

Board Member Castaneda expressed support for proposed bill language recommendations 2-4, but could not support the first recommendation. Board Chair Delgado Olson responded that the first recommendation was to address the idea that public purpose programs are a significant burden on customer bills, which analysis has shown that they are not. Board Chair Delgado-Olson also recommended including tribal representation in the proposed bill language amendments. Board Member Castaneda appreciated the comments, but could not support that proposed recommendation because the bill intends to offer creative financing mechanisms to lower customer bills that he supports.

Board Chair Delgado-Olson asked if the authority in SB 1020 comes into law that creates a customer assistance fund, whether the CPUC could reasonably implement a surcharge to fund low income programs in the case of an economic recession that affects the California state budget. Commissioner Shiroma answered, speaking for herself, that it would be a paradigm

shift to fund programs in a different way and recommended taking more time to evaluate any unintended consequences of the bill language as is.

Board Member Medina commented that low income programs need public advocates to explain to the public how they benefit all Californians. She also expressed the concerns of middle class ratepayers who are not eligible for assistance programs, but may be financially burdened.

Board Member Medina expressed support for Assembly Bill 2750 and recommended the Board consider voting to support it along with the other bills.

Commissioner Shiroma commented that she would be abstaining from voting on any bills to support due to her role on the CPUC. Board Members Wimbley and Hernandez also abstained from voting.

Board Vice-Chair Stamas moved to vote on recommending the list of bills, including AB 2750, and the specific recommendations for SB 1020. Board Member Medina seconded the motion. Board Members Delgado-Olson, Stamas, Castaneda, Medina, Castilone, Irwin, Watts, and Tang voted in support of all proposed recommendations. The Chairs of the two subcommittees as well as Board Member Medina will work on drafting a letter to codify these recommendations.

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

6. Summer Reliability Proceeding Related to Low-income Customers

Board Vice-Chair Stamas reconvened the Board at approximately 1:00 PM.

Rosette Solidum of SCE provided a [joint electric IOU update on the Summer Reliability Proceeding](#) (R.20-11-003), including information on smart thermostats and the Emergency Reduction Load Program (ELRP).

Vice-Chair Stamas asked about SCE's automatic enrollment of CARE and FERA customer in their ELRP and whether that meant they would lose power in certain situations. Commissioner Shiroma clarified that this program would not affect their power, but rather would reimburse them for reducing power during certain times.

Commissioner Shiroma thanked the utilities to their follow-through on this issue and for providing low income ratepayers for the opportunity to contribute to decreasing electric demand.

Board Member Medina asked how this information was being shared with PG&E customers. PG&E answered that the ELRP takes place on FlexAlert days, but there have not been any FlexAlert days this year. Customers can check on whether they are enrolled in this by going to <https://powersaver.pge.com/>.

Board Member Castaneda asked if it was still the case for SCE ESA customers that they cannot receive a smart thermostat unless they receive a heating, ventilation, or air conditioning (HVAC)

measure and whether the other utilities follow the same policy. SCE answered they only provide smart thermostats to certain ESA customers due to budget constraints. Board Member Castaneda expressed that it was unfair to ESA customers in SCE territory to not be able to manage their usage compared to other utility customers. He recommended this topic for further discussion.

7. Universal Application System (UAS) Working Group Recommendations

Ryan Shahbazi of SoCalGas presented a [joint utility presentation on the Universal Application System Working Group Recommendations](#), which were made available to the public in July 2022. The presentation also included a summary of the working group members, activities leading up to recommendations, new findings, and next steps.

Commissioner Shiroma mentioned the Lifeline and CalFresh collaboration, which allows customer verification for Lifeline to be automatically qualified for Lifeline assistance.

Board Member Irwin asked what type of income verification would be required, whether it be self-certified or by uploading documents. Mr. Shahbazi answered that the UAs would be a questionnaire that would connect customers to the appropriate programs, which could hopefully be supplemented by the Statewide Verification Hub, but individual programs would still have specific income verification requirements.

Board Member Castaneda brought up categorical eligibility and how that could be streamlined in a UAS.

Board Member Castilone expressed support for this effort, but hoped that there could be something available sooner than 2024. She also commented on including energy usage data, which is needed for many programs. Mr. Shahbazi clarified that 2024 is for the statewide verification hub, but there is no implementation date for the UAS at this time.

Commissioner Shiroma mentioned the ongoing low income energy and water data sharing, which shows collaboration cross utility programs.

7. Disconnections and Arrearage Management Update

An update on the current state of disconnections and arrearage management was provided by both Board Member Jason Wimbley, California Community Services and Development representative, and by the IOUs.

Board Member Wimbley shared information on the CAPP. Currently IOUs are confirming reporting on the distribution on the first round of funds. The 2022-2023 state budget authorized \$1.2B additional funds for arrearage funds. The 2022 CAPP will operate similarly to the previous year's program, which offers funds for both investor owned and municipal utilities. The program will also include a prohibition on disconnections during the application period and for CAPP recipients for 90 days after receiving assistance. Key differences between the 2022 program and the 2021 program are that this year's assistance is targeted for active residential

accounts and that there is a broader application window, which includes arrearages incurred through December 2021. The application for utilities will be available by the end of September and be due at the end of October. CSD plans to approve funds for distribution in the first quarter of 2023.

Commissioner Shiroma asked about the distribution of water assistance. Board Member Wimbley clarified that CSD received federal funds for water arrearages and state funding to extend the assistance. The priority is on distributing the federal funds first, and then utilizing the state funds. This assistance program is on a separate administrative track from the CAPP.

Commissioner Shiroma also clarified that the CAPP is available to all income level ratepayers in arrearage distress.

Board Member Castilone asked how many Community Choice Aggregators (CCA) and electric cooperatives would be worked with. Board Member Wimbley answered that they would reach out to all CCAs in coordination with IOUs. CSD is also reaching out to the electric cooperatives to make them aware of the program.

Representatives of PG&E, SCE, San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E), and SoCalGas provided an [update on their Arrearage Management Plans](#) (AMP) and the current state of disconnections.

Board Chair Delgado-Olson asked if outbound calls referred to calls made, or if they are calls that customers answered. PG&E answered that they were calls made, not necessarily answered.

Board Member Medina asked if it is being tracked whether payment plan recipients were able to avoid accruing new debt during the repayment period and if there was data on the demographics of the enrolled customers. PG&E answered that they would have to come back to the board with that information.

Board Vice-Chair Stamas asked about the resumption of credit collections in quarter three of 2022 and how those align with the CAPP application. PG&E answered that the collections would be only for customers that are not CAPP eligible. Board Vice-Chair Stamas also noted the low completion rate and whether there are opportunities for program improvement to help customers complete the payment plan.

Board Member Wimbley asked if there is a time that this program would be evaluated for its effectiveness, to make sure it is assisting customers as intended. Commissioner Shiroma expressed support for hearing about opportunities to improve the program.

Board Member Castilone commented on the outreach being done for AMP and whether that could be utilized for informing customers of other programs.

Board Vice-Chair Stamas asked if SCE had information on how many of the eligible customers were enrolled. SCE answered that they would have to follow-up with that information.

Board Member Wimbley asked if a customer was only able to partially complete the program, if they were still able to receive some assistance based on their partial participation? Additionally, at what month they typically fall off the program. SCE answered that there is a lot more detail in the monthly disconnections report and that customers who fall off AMP still are enrolled in a standard 24-month payment plan.

Board Member Medina asked about the customer segmentation data for customers enrolled on AMP and if there would be a way to see how many seniors participated. SDG&E answered that they would have to follow up if they could access that information.

Board Member Castaneda followed up on a suggestion for a standard template for this information. Board Member Hernandez confirmed that the IOUs could work on a template and present it for feedback at a subcommittee meeting.

Commissioner Shiroma pointed out that water customers are also experiencing high customer arrearages.

Board Member Medina acknowledged the effect that disconnections and bill collections have on people's renter history, credit history, ability to get a loan, and general wellbeing.

Board Member Castilone commented that she sees disconnections printed in bold red lettering on customer bills, even though there isn't a threat of disconnections for certain customers. It could be contributing to undue stress on customers.

Board Member Castaneda mentioned the multiple workforces and programs, and the issue of how to coordinate this best.

5. CPUC Standing Reports – Water Division Update

At this point in the meeting. Board Chair Delgado-Olson had to depart early and transferred facilitation of the meeting to Board Vice-Chair Stamas.

Viet “Kevin” Trương of the CPUC Water Division provided an [update on current Customer Assistance Program \(CAP\), Conservation, and Water Utility Acquisitions Proceeding](#).

Board Member Tang commented on the conservation efforts and explained that many of the opportunities to conserve tend to happen in the second half of the year.

Board Member Castaneda commented on his own personal water bill experiences, in which conserving water usage has not been reflected in lower bills, in part to fixed costs.

Board Member Medina commented on the availability of information on the different water rates throughout the state and encouraged more analysis of water burden.

Commissioner Shiroma addressed how utilities have to still recover fixed costs even when water usage goes down, which can result in bills not decreasing with usage. Board Member Tang agreed with the Commissioner and explained that bills go up when usage goes down. He

also commented that this phenomenon applies to public water utilities as well. Board Member Tang also shared that the investor owned water utilities are the only water utilities that offer a low income assistance program.

9. Joint Investor-Owned Utilities Status Reports

Board Member Hernandez provided brief opening remarks and highlighted the ESA solicitation timeline, CARE and FERA enrollment and rate discounts, the ESA working groups, and pilot programs. [More information was provided to the Board in advance.](#)

Commissioner Shiroma asked how the utilities felt they were doing in terms of tribal outreach. SCE answered that they have engaged with all federally recognized tribes in their territory and completed ESA installations in two tribal communities. Five other tribes have completed consultations. PG&E shared guidelines for tribal specific ESA grants in June and four tribes attended an informational meeting. SoCalGas shared that they don't have a dedicated tribal outreach coordinator. Only six tribes have SoCalGas meters on their lands and the utility actively reaches out to them. SDG&E has met with eleven of the seventeen federally recognized tribes in their territories and meets with tribes on a quarterly basis, regardless of customer eligibility. They also partner with two culturally affiliated CBOs.

Commissioner Shiroma also asked if there was anything else to be done to increase FERA enrollment. SCE answered that they have aggressively tried to increase FERA enrollment and suggested an auto enrollment process. PG&E noted that only about 6% of their customers are eligible for FERA, so it is a small demographic. They have also coordinated with communities that may have many FERA customers. SDG&E shared similar comments to the other IOUS and mentioned their increased customized marketing for FERA.

Board Member Medina asked about the counties with low penetration rate and whether tribal communities are included in that. PG&E answered that those slides refer to all CARE eligible customers, not tribal specific.

Board Member Irwin commented on the requirements of the most recent low income programs decision, which requires several specific outreach efforts for tribal communities, including maintaining two tribal contacts, consultation meetings every six months, and tribal mini grants. Board Member Irwin also noted that the definition of tribes being extended to include non-federally recognized tribes. In the current reports, only PG&E included non-federally recognized tribes. Board Member Irwin also commented that sending blanket emails to all tribes is not considered meaningful consultation.

Board Member Castilone commented on PG&E's response rate to their mini grant offering, which was only four tribes out of the 109 tribes eligible. Board Member Castilone also asked if there was still a 10-year time limit between ESA services. PG&E said there is a not hard time limit, but depends on the need of the customer.

Board Member Castaneda offered the LIEAP subcommittee to entertain these issues, such as FERA enrollment and tribal outreach.

Board Member Watts commented on the ESA program and budget. She is personally aware of contractors that have had to lay off employees due to decreased funding and also that there are customers on waitlists. Board Member Watts expressed that there are many issues and concerns in regard to ESA, which in the interest of time, should be discussed soon at a subcommittee meeting.

Board Castaneda seconded Board Member Watts comments and noted that there could be up to 20,000 customers on the waitlist. It is important to hear from contractors to see how the transition process is affecting them. Board Member Castaneda also commented on the peaks and valleys of the SCE budget across the five-year program cycle, which could be addressed if the ESA decision allowed budget flexibility across years.

SCE commented that they are exploring a budget infusion from the Multifamily Affordable Solar Housing (MASH) program, but is subject to the filing and the approval of an advice letter. SCE does not have 20,000 customers on a waitlist now, but that it is their forecasted waitlist if they continue to enroll customers at the current rate. In regard to the smart thermostats, not all customers receive them due to SCE's effort to optimize their energy portfolio.

5. CPUC Standing Reports – Energy Division Update

Kapil Kulkarni, of the CPUC Energy Division, provided [updates on the large IOUs ESA/CARE/FERA program cycle, including IOUs 2022 ESA reporting, ESA program solicitations, and the Low Income Needs Assessment \(LINA\)](#).

There were no questions or comments from the Board on this agenda item.

10. Coordination Report on Low Income Weatherization Program (LIWP)/ Subcommittee Reports/ Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Updates

In the interest of time and lack of substantive updates, agenda items 10-12 were not discussed in the meeting.

13. Wrap Up & Closing Remarks

Board Vice-Chair Stamas provided brief closing remarks. Board Member Castaneda acknowledged Mary O'Drain's (PG&E) upcoming retirement. He commented on her lengthy service and thanked her for all of her contributions to low income programs.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:15 PM.