

April 6, 2018

Dear Energy Efficiency Advisory Council:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the Mass Save program. I am submitting this letter as a Montague resident and a consultant who works with homeowners to explore, prioritize and find incentives for energy efficiency and renewable energy options for their home. I have also served as a member of the Montague Energy Committee since 2008, which has collaborated with Mass Save on education and outreach. In 2009, I participated in the Western MA Energy Alliance, a group of private, nonprofit, and municipal energy professionals who discussed ways to make energy efficiency education and outreach more effective in our region.

That is all to say that over the last ten years I have been engaged in a variety of capacities with the Mass Save program and have discussed the program with many energy colleagues, clients and neighbors. Based on this broad experience, I share my perspective with the advisory council on how I think Mass Save can be more effective with programmatic changes.

**First, I recommend that Mass Save explore more effective means of promoting its program.**

While I have seen a significant improvement in the usability of your website, your other outreach and education is very limited. Energy program design experts like Doug McKenzie-Mohr tell us that traditional marketing tools such as radio and TV ads alone are not effective at furthering the adoption of energy saving measures; surprisingly, nor is promoting the cost savings of energy efficiency, according to sustainability marketing company, the Shelton Group.

**Rather than spending money on expensive media ads, the program should target communities and neighborhoods with community-based, hands-on social marketing.** To be clear, this is *not* marketing based on social *media*, although that is one tool in the social marketing toolbox. Here are some examples of effective promotional strategies, from McKenzie-Mohr and the Shelton Group:

- Marketing that targets specific audiences such as concerned parents who value the resale price of their home, along with comfort and health benefits.
- Motivating consumers rather than educating them.
- Using community-based social marketing such as:
  - Working closely with community organizations, energy committees, and faith groups to develop social norms around the adoption of energy efficiency measures.
    - Using lawn signs, public testimonials in local papers, social media posts, etc. to help create a social norm.
  - Door-to-door canvassing and follow-up phone calls.



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**As McKenzie-Mohr points out, any question, problem, or additional step that a consumer encounters in the process of taking action becomes a barrier to moving forward.** To increase Mass Save's participation rate, the program interface with consumers needs to be simple and without long call wait times and additional calls to set up weatherization visits.

**To reduce barriers to participating, I recommend that Mass Save:**

- Hire more staff to answer calls, especially during the busiest winter season.
- Hire more contractors for weatherization installation.
- Address the inconsistency in answers that callers, including myself, receive from call staff.
- Increase the grant amounts for the removal of asbestos, vermiculite and knob and tube wiring and the necessary re-wiring, to reduce the number of people for whom the cost is a barrier.
- Allow homeowners to use the HEAT Loan for high costs of the removal of asbestos, vermiculite and knob and tube wiring and the necessary re-wiring.
- Promote on the *first* web page that residents click on, large incentives like the lifting of the cap on insulation incentives. Currently, you have to drill down several levels to find that offer.
- Give all consumers an energy assessment unless they choose to opt out.
- Survey consumers who have participated in the program to determine barriers to participation, issues that arose throughout the process, etc., to identify ways to improve participants' experiences and increase participation on an ongoing basis.

I was pleased to see on your data website a sizable increase from 2016 to 2017 in your expenditures for low income residents. **However, low income, disabled and elderly residents, people of color, and non-English speakers need outreach designed to target these populations and their particular needs. Mass Save should especially target low-income populations since they pay a higher percentage of their income for utility costs compared to other residents.** Moderate income residents should qualify for full subsidies of energy saving measures that they would otherwise be unable to afford.

**My recommendations for reaching renters more effectively include:**

- Target outreach to landlords that highlights the benefits to the landlords of implementing energy efficiency measures, benefits such as incentives to cover most of the costs and more comfortable housing that is likely to have lower turnover rates.
- Explore potential ways for renters who pay their own utility bills to implement Mass Save measures without the permission of landlords (i.e. at minimum, LED light bulbs, power strips and low flow faucets and showerheads, that would not impact the property significantly).



**My town's energy committee, on which I serve, would find it useful to have data on the energy consumption of town residents, Mass Save participation rates by year and zip code, and other similar data to help us identify and target our outreach to residents and to promote the idea that saving energy is a social norm here.** I was glad to learn at the listening session that some data is available at [masssavedata.com](http://masssavedata.com).

Lastly, as an energy consultant, I regularly see homes that have been through Mass Save assessments and weatherization and do not come near meeting your specifications for R-values in attic insulation and have limited or no basement rim joist air sealing or insulation.

While I am relieved that the program now has built-in quality assurance inspections after work is performed, I believe there are systemic problems which are, in part, responsible for inconsistent work. I offer the following recommendations.

- As I understand, contracts for lead vendors are renewed every two years, which barely gives them time to establish the program and train employees.
  - A longer contract of say five years would allow them to maintain a trained workforce and make their program efficient and effective.
- Contracts with lead vendors should be assessed against regular goals, with penalties for not meeting goals and incentives for exceeding them.
  - Goals should be based on measured energy savings and on grades from quality assurance inspections, to keep the vendors accountable.
    - Contracts for underperforming lead vendors should be terminated early.
    - Energy saving data from each lead vendor should be made available to the public, again for accountability and transparency.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

*Sally Pick*