EQUITY WORKING GROUP (EWG)
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, April 7, 2025
Virtual Meeting: Zoom

Equity Working Group Members Present: Jo Ann Bodemer (for Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony), Brooks Winner, Stephanie Terach, Sonakshi Saxena, William Rose, Mary Wambui, Doug Quattrochi, Jhenny Saint-Surin, Maggie Downey, Kyle Murray, Margie Lynch, Alexis Washburn, Charles Harak, Adrian Caesar, James Collins

Equity Working Group Members Absent: Cindy Luppi

Other Attendees: Jordan Galluzzo, Ina Dasso, Alissa Whiteman, Andrea Mendoza, Bernetta Morton, Chris McClellan, Cora Funke, Elizabeth Youngblood, Emily Lamb, Emma Zeher, Griff Keating, Hayley Kallfelz, Jennifer Applebaum, Joycelyn Lee, Joe Nunley, Kate Peters, Katelyn Tessier, Kimberly Jaeger Johnson, Leah Cohen, Melody Abedinejad, Quiana Lee-Gaines, Rachel Evans, Sam Nigro

1. Call to Order

Bodemer, acting on behalf of the Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:02 AM.

Virtual Meeting Procedure
Bodemer reviewed the virtual EEAC meeting procedure:

1. The Council meeting would be recorded, for administrative purposes only.
2. All attendees except for Councilors and presenters would remain muted for the duration of the meeting.
3. Councilors should hold comments until the end of presentations, but Councilors and other participants should speak instead of using any chat function.
4. Councilors who disconnect from meetings need to announce when they rejoin.
5. All Council votes would be taken by roll call.

2. Public Comment

No participants provided public comment.

3. EWG Business and Updates

Bodemer asked the EWG if they would be interested in having Councilor Spotlight segments and to email Dasso with their thoughts.

James Collins joined the virtual meeting at 11:08 AM.

Mendoza, Director of Energy Services at Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), provided an update on the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP). Mendoza said that all Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) HEAP staff were discharged on April 1. Mendoza said that this was sudden, unexpected, and very disturbing. Mendoza explained that the HEAP program is still operating in Massachusetts, and the community organizations are unaffected and still taking applications. Mendoza said that the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) is also unaffected. Mendoza said that there is no immediate action to the HEAP funding because the program was appropriated by Congress through September 30. Mendoza said that there is restructuring within HHS, so it remains to be seen who will administer the program. Mendoza noted that Massachusetts can still draw its funds up to the 90% threshold, but there is uncertainty regarding the remaining 10%. Mendoza said that the main concern is whether HEAP will receive funding in fiscal year 2026. Mendoza said that ABCD will arrange testimony at the upcoming Senate hearing on behalf of the program. Mendoza said that HEAP is a bipartisan program that has been approved by Congress for over forty years, so ABCD is confident that it will persist. Mendoza said that ABCD will continue to advocate and fight for the program.

Bodemer asked if there are other programs implicated by the HEAP layoffs. Mendoza said that the Heating System Weatherization Repair and Replacement Program is also funded through HEAP.

Harak said that concerns for 2026 are immediate because HHS did not release the model state plan, and there are typically program specialists who aid states in planning to ensure approval. Harak said that he heard someone has altered employee evaluations so that it is easier to fire people. Harak said that even if money is appropriated for 2026, the program needs employees for administration, operating the funding-allocation formula, and helping states obtain their funding.

Collins said that the Income-Eligible programs and customer engagement through fuel assistance will not be impacted in the near term, but they could be if the state cannot appropriate HEAP funding in the next fiscal year. Collins added that the loss of HEAP funding would also cause job loss within the CAPs, so ABCD is preparing a contingency if this does occur.

Murray said that HEAP is a critical program, and federal officials who are trying to dismantle it should be ashamed. Murray thanked everyone who is trying to maintain the program as best as possible.

Washburn thanked Mendoza and Collins for the update. Washburn asked how the discontinuation of HEAP might impact the qualification process for the Income-Eligible

program. Collins said that customers can become eligible for Income-Eligible programs by enrolling in the discount rate. Collins said that there is also data matching from other income-qualified programs. Collins said that ABCD is collaborating with the PAs to solidify the alternative qualification pathways in case HEAP is not approved for 2026.

December EWG meeting minutes
Bodemer asked if the EWG had any revisions to the December EWG Meeting Minutes. No EWG members proposed edits. DOER, as Chair of the EWG, approved the December EWG Meeting Minutes as submitted.

January EWG meeting minutes
Bodemer asked if the EWG had any revisions to the January EWG Meeting Minutes. No EWG members proposed edits. DOER, as Chair of the EWG, approved the January EWG Meeting Minutes as submitted.

4. DPU Order on the 2025-2027 Plan: Equity Priorities for Compliance Filing

Bodemer explained that the PAs must develop a 2025-2027 Plan Compliance Filing by April 30. Bodemer requested that the non-Councilor members of the EWG attend the April EEAC Meeting. Bodemer said that the Councilors completed a survey to prioritize areas of continued investment in the Plan. Bodemer said that DOER and the EEAC Consultants summarized the results of the prioritization survey and posted them for review last Friday.

Lynch said that one goal of the survey was to link the potential budget cuts to quantitative data so that Councilors could provide informed responses. Lynch said that another goal of the survey was to provide the PAs with direction and guidance, but narrowing down the questions was challenging due to the complexity of the Residential budget. Lynch said that the survey included open-ended prompts so that Councilors could provide any additional input that they wanted on the record. Lynch said that the PAs, DOER, and the EEAC Consultants appreciate that the Councilors took full advantage of the opportunity and provided thoughtful feedback.

Quattrochi said that he appreciated the process and the chance to rank priorities.

Bodemer said that a key finding was that the Council wants to prioritize weatherization because it reduces greenhouse-gas emissions and customers' energy bills. Bodemer said that weatherization assures us that we are meeting affordability objectives while achieving climate goals.

Rose said that he strongly agrees with Bodemer. Rose said that weatherization reduces participant costs, puts downward pressure on the electric-system capacity, and reduces greenhouse-gas emissions. Rose said that this is a great opportunity after a winter of high bills.

Harak said that weatherization effectively maximizes the budget while helping the most people, which is particularly important with a reduced budget.

Quattrochi said that he agrees with the outcome of the summary document, but that he was interested in hearing the minority opinions that were not included in the summaries. Bodemer said that the document characterizes all the written input, and the PAs have access to every written response.

Winner said that he was glad to see that Councilors prioritized barrier mitigation. Winner said that barrier mitigation is crucial to serving underserved customers even though it does not incur direct savings or emissions reductions.

Rose asked for the data associated with the pie charts in the document. Keating said that he can answer that question after looking at the raw data.

Wambui said that it is good to recognize that customers who switch to heat-pumps from electric-resistance heat and delivered fuels incur immediate bill savings. Bodemer said that there was a clear consensus that the PAs should prioritize heat-pump investment for customers using electric resistance and delivered fuels for the purpose of immediate customer bill savings and emissions reductions.

Washburn suggested that the introduction of the document address the overlap between Moderate-Income customers and renters. Lynch said that the PAs have structured the budget to have dedicated funding streams for renters in the Market-Rate and Moderate-Income classifications.

Bodemer said that there was an overarching consensus around preserving offerings to the Designated Equity Communities (DECs) as much as possible. Quattrochi said that the document should explicitly state that the EWG wants to preserve the 100% offerings for the DECs.

Wambui said that the DECs themselves and the people who live within them are most important to her. Quattrochi clarified that it can be difficult to pitch partial offerings to landlords who have no extra budget, and the 100% offerings are most likely to cause rental properties in the DECs to participate in the program.

Bodemer asked if the EWG was comfortable with the final document, which will be posted as a meeting material for the April 16 EEAC Meeting and be shared as the voice of the EWG. No EWG members objected.

5. 2025 EWG Schedule and Meeting Topics: Updates

Lynch, on behalf of the EEAC Consultants, presented updates to the 2025 EWG Schedule.

EWG Discussion

Quattrochi suggested that the EWG meet in-person after the Compliance Filing. Bodemer said that the May EEAC Meeting will take place in-person, and the August EWG Meeting could potentially be in-person.

Bodemer said that Austin Dawson, on behalf of DOER, would present the recommendations of the Massachusetts Interagency Rates Working Group to consider a non-bypassable-public-benefits-fixed charge and seasonal-heat-pump rates at the lunch-and-learn discussion prior to the April EEAC Meeting. Bodemer said that the lunch and learn is open to the public and encouraged non-Councilor EWG members to attend if they were curious about rate design.

Winner asked if DOER had an invitation that he could share with his team. Bodemer said that Dasso would forward a meeting invite.

Peters said that the PAs thank the entire EWG for their meaningful feedback.

Wambui highlighted Downey and the Cape Light Compact's Cape & Vineyard Electrification Offering and said that she is excited to see the results. Lynch said that the PAs will publish a program evaluation in August and that the evaluation would be a great topic at a Fall EEAC Meeting.

Applebaum asked for clarification on the date of the extraordinary April EEAC Meeting. Bodemer responded that the full EEAC Meeting is on April 16 and the extraordinary EEAC Meeting is on April 28.

Winner said that he attended the participation orientation for Community First Partners in Framingham, and the local leaders are doing excellent work to expand access to the Mass Save programs and serve historically underserved communities. Winner said that there has been a lot of confusion and concern in light of the budget cuts and other recent events, but it was inspiring to see firsthand that the work will continue despite the challenges.

6. Adjournment

Bodemer, acting on behalf of the Chair, adjourned the meeting at 12:18 PM.

Meeting Materials:

- Official Meeting Notice
- Meeting Link
- Agenda
- December 2, 2024, EWG Meeting Minutes – DRAFT
- January 8, 2025, EWG Meeting Minutes – DRAFT
- 2025 EWG Meeting Topics – Revised 2025.04.03
- Councilor Survey Email Correspondence
- Councilor Survey on 2025-2027 Residential Budget Cuts
- Survey Feedback Summary