

Energy Efficiency Advisory Council
Public Hearing
January 10, 2012

My name is Gladys Vega and I am the Executive Director of the Chelsea Collaborative. The Chelsea Collaborative is a Steering Committee member of the Green Justice Coalition. Through GJC, Chelsea was chosen as one of four pilot communities for weatherization and energy efficiency work. The goal of the pilot, launched in early December 2010, is to increase the number of participants in energy efficiency programs who earn between 60 and 120% median household income. Research shows that more affluent homeowners actively seek weatherization services and extremely low-income individuals are eligible for free weatherization offered through community action program agencies. Low-to moderate-income households often do not participate in these programs. However, each and every rate payer pays a little extra in his/her electric and/or gas bill for energy efficiency. The pilot benefits Chelsea, my community, by: weatherizing homes saving homeowners and renters money while improving the environment and by offering green jobs with good wages to Chelsea folks, especially young adults.

Through our outreach, we have identified the most significant challenges in reaching/serving low-to-moderate income customers in Chelsea. Therefore, we urge the Program Administrators to include the following recommendations in the next three year plans:

1. ***Low cost pre-weatherization measures should be funded by current programs for low-to-moderate income ratepayers.*** There have been many productive discussions about how to address pre-weatherization costs since the Green Justice Coalition first highlighted this barrier three years ago. In Chelsea we have learned that almost 40% of the people who complete an audit cannot follow through to implementation due to low-cost pre-weatherization issues. Low-to-moderate income ratepayers do not have disposable income, which makes it difficult for this population to pay \$200-\$400 to address pre-weatherization needs, and yet the energy savings would definitely outweigh these costs. We also continuing the conversation about identifying other outside funding sources to cover some of the higher cost pre-weatherization issues.
2. ***Current rebate structures should be re-examined with an eye towards equity and with the appropriate data and reporting mechanisms.*** Low-to-moderate income ratepayers have a difficult time taking advantage of the 75% weatherization rebates up to \$2000, incentives for appliances and the Heat Loan. In addition, ratepayers in this income bracket are more likely than middle income ratepayers to experience credit-worthiness issues. In Chelsea we were able to secure outside funding through ARRA funds and other means to cover the 25 percent co-pay, but this mechanism occurred outside of our pilot. A sliding scale rebate structure that aims to provide a higher rebate for people earning 60% of the state median income would eliminate the co-pay barrier that many Chelsea residents face.

For the next three year plans, the Green Justice Coalition is interested in working with the utilities to develop a tiered rebate structure that would allow ratepayers earning 60-120% state median income to access larger rebates and incentives so

they can afford to weatherize their homes. In addition, there is no statewide database that is publicly accessible to multiple stakeholders that would help us understand who is being served by current programs and where there still may be gaps. Good, consistent and accessible data is absolutely crucial in ensuring we are using ratepayer funds in the most efficient and equitable way.

Thank you so much for scheduling this public hearing and for providing me the opportunity to comment.

Gladys Vega
Executive Director
Chelsea Collaborative