

Thank you for accepting comments regarding the next 3-year plan for the MassSave program.

My name is Uli Nagel, and I am the Director of a non-profit called ener-G-save and it's Cooler Communities program. We have been working in Pioneer Valley and the Berkshires for 4 years with the purpose - among others - of bringing more people to MassSave.

Our experience as a non-profit promoting energy efficiency and other climate related action at the household level in Western Massachusetts has shown that many homeowners have a positive experience with the program. My comments below aim to bring attention to places where I hope the next three-year plan will make things even better.

From our experience, about 40% of people* we have worked with are finding it hard to navigate the MassSave programs. And among those who could most benefit from weatherization, the number is even higher. They are people living on low, fixed or moderate incomes as well as renters.

To share an example: we learned that the local CAP agency, Springfield Partners put their service on hold once their quota was fulfilled, well before the end of 2019. We were aware at the time that there was a waiting list of customers eager to receive service during the coldest months of the year. Upon inquiring, it was impossible to ascertain if funding had run out, or if there was a shortage of auditors, or if they just stopped because they met their quota. Transparency would be important so that evaluations can be made for new budgets or new trainings of needed audit/insulation teams.

We strongly believe that these communities would benefit greatly from workforce development programs focused on the skills needed to conduct audits and implement energy conservation and green energy measures. Increasing the available pool of workers would allow more properties to be serviced. An example of such an effort is the Eversource Program led by Gamal Sherif with which we have collaborated. His program supporting vocational schools in developing energy conservation-related training for students provides them employment opportunities and can help the communities in which they live. I urge the new MassSave 3-year plan to include training programs, especially offered within underserved, front-line communities.

Workshops designed directly to encourage landlords to have audits of their rental properties have proven to be useful tools, particularly when the incentive for weatherization is 100% of the cost, and when they are approached directly. Renters - who pay into the fund that supports weatherization programs - are often reluctant to contact their landlords and MassSave needs to go the extra mile of informing those property owners. In the face of the need to address climate change and to help low and fixed income renters who typically pay for their own heating bills, providing more motivation to property owners makes sense.

We urge MassSave and other State agencies to work to promote local efforts in support of the Mass Save programs. Providing funding and especially data for local groups to 'work their neighborhoods' might well be a better use of marketing funds for MassSave. It would be helpful to have someone designated to respond to these grassroots projects, providing materials in a timely, up-to-date, well translated way, if needed. We applaud MassSave for providing information in Spanish and Portuguese and hope to see more languages be added to better serve other populations that are clustered in various neighborhoods.

In general, and in service to local efforts, there is a great need for good data, data on communities that have been well served, and those that have yet to be approached. This is essential for community groups to design meaningful targeted programs, to reach those who need but have not received weatherization services. Sharing such information in the context of confidentiality is critical to maximizing access to and benefits from these programs. We urge that this problem finally be addressed as it has been an impediment for too long.

Thank you to all who are working to ensure that the next three-year plan will resolve hurdles and propel the State to new levels of efficiency. I especially hope it will address transparency, data, training, and focus.