

**Department of Human Services
Fiscal Year 2021 Operating Budget
Response to Department of Legislative Services Budget Analysis**

**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Health and Human Services Subcommittee
Senator Melony Ghee Griffith
Friday, February 21, 2020**

**House Appropriations Committee
Health and Social Services Subcommittee
Delegate Kirill Reznik
Wednesday, February 12, 2020**

Response to Issues

Issue #1: DHS should comment on whether it plans to continue this practice (carrying portion of LIHEAP funding forward into next state fiscal year). (Page 17)

Response to Issue

The Department plans to continue the practice of using carried over LIHEAP funds to accelerate the payment of MEAP benefits in the first quarter of the state fiscal year. This practice allows for MEAP funds to expeditiously restore utility service prior to the onset of winter. The earlier release of funds also allows OHEP to schedule bulk fuel deliveries well in advance of the onset of crises. Prior to this practice, approved households would wait until early December to receive MEAP benefits for which they were approved, and tens of thousands of bulk fuel deliveries would be scheduled at once resulting in delivery delays and empty fuel tanks. OHEP works closely with the DHS Budget Management Division to ensure that adequate funds are available to cover existing benefit commitments should there be potential delays in the disbursement of LIHEAP funds at the beginning of the federal fiscal year.

Issue #2: The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) recommends deleting the regular positions that have been vacant for longer than two years. (Page 18)

Response to Issue

The Department respectfully disagrees with this recommended action. These positions are important to the success of the new Critical Medical Needs Program. As noted in the Fiscal and Policy note for Senate Bill 425/House Bill 1189 of 2019 (Chapters 282 and 283), the Critical



Medical Needs Program requires two positions within OHEP to facilitate a statewide Critical Medical Needs Program and track the status of participants. As noted on page 9 of the budget analysis, the Critical Medical Needs Program launched statewide in October 2019. This program is performing well but still in the early stages and preparing for expansion. These positions will provide expedited service to the most vulnerable applicants and improve outreach to individuals with disabilities, as also noted on page 9 of the analysis.

The positions were initially vacant due to retirements in OHEP local administering agencies. The positions were eventually transferred to state OHEP. Since the transfer to state OHEP, two rounds of interviews were conducted for each position. Due to the sensitive nature of the interactions with medically vulnerable applicants in crisis and the tight labor market, appropriate candidates were not identified through this process. OHEP is in the process of revising the job descriptions for these positions to match the talent available to the positions and anticipates posting these positions again in the coming months.

Response to Recommended Action

Recommended Action #1

Delete 1.37 regular positions that have been vacant longer than two years. **(Page 2 and 24)**

Response:

The Department respectfully disagrees with this recommended action. These positions will provide expedited service to the most vulnerable applicants and improve outreach to individuals with disabilities.

Recommended Action #2

Adopt narrative requesting information on energy assistance application processing times. **(Page 2 and 24)**

Response:

The Department concurs with the Analyst's Recommended Action.