

**Carol Biedrzycki**

**From:** Gutierrez, Jawana  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 23, 2013 10:00 AM  
**To:** Carol Biedrzycki; Ruby Roa; Lanetta Cooper; Randy Chapman  
**Cc:** Overton, Kerry; Cervenka, Marnie; Mendoza, Ronnie  
**Subject:** RE: Follow to Meeting on CEAP Pledges and Automatic Enrollment

Listed in the table below are status updates and target dates on which I will provide responses to the issues raised during our meeting on September 23<sup>rd</sup> and summarized in the attached email. In addition to the target response dates, I will also provide monthly 30-day check-ins (via email) to give an update on the progress of each item. Several of these items are large policy items and should be vetted by a broader set of community advocates as well as City management. In order to focus on these broader items, I am planning a meeting in January with a wide array of community advocates and will be sure to include you all in the meeting.

Request from Meeting	Target Response Date	Status Update
Improve the process to receive CEAP pledges	Completed October 15, 2013	Starting Sept 19 <sup>th</sup> , city staff has held several meetings with Travis County to improve the pledge process. Several improvements were identified, tested, and successfully implemented on October 15 <sup>th</sup> , 2013 resolving the CEAP issue stated in the email below.
Increase the duration of Pay Plans for customers with CEAP pledges	Completed October 15, 2013	In conjunction with the improved processes above, the City has implemented the option for a 45-day Pay Plan for customers with Travis County pledges.
Retroactively enroll CAP customers who were not enrolled due to the delay in the automatic enrollment process	November 22, 2013	Although the automatic enrollment was delayed, the manual enrollment process was performed for <u>all</u> eligible customers under the new program. Staff has requested historical data reports for the various programs to ensure that no customer was delayed in enrollment. We plan to have the final analysis by November 22.
Determine a program that can assist low-income customers who do not meet CEAP criteria	January, 2014	Staff will begin initial planning for a meeting with community advocates regarding additional program offerings. While Austin has one of the most generous and flexible programs in the nation, staff has initiated research on the variety of programs offered by other utilities.
Provide relevant policy information to our customers	January, 2014	A review has begun to identify any relevant policy that is not currently provided on our website. If found, policy information will be published by January.

Please let me know if there is additional information that I can provide prior to the next update on November 22<sup>nd</sup>.  
Thank you,

**Jawana JJ Gutierrez | Vice President Customer Care Services | Austin Energy**  
721 Barton Springs Road | Austin, Texas 78704 | (P) 512-322-6596 | (F) 512-505-3964

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**From:** Cervenka, Marnie  
**Sent:** Monday, October 21, 2013 2:57 PM  
**To:** Overton, Kerry; Gutierrez, Jawana  
**Cc:** Weis, Larry  
**Subject:** FW: Follow to Meeting on CEAP Pledges and Automatic Enrollment

FYI...Hayden called to let me know Carol B has contact CMO again. She claims no one got back with her regarding the email below however she didn't copy JJ and Larry. If you have responded please provide a copy of what she was sent. If AE hasn't responded can you please let me know what our plan of action is so I can follow up with Hayden.  
Thanks,

**Marnie Cervenka** | Chief of Staff | Austin Energy  
721 Barton Springs Rd. | Austin, TX 78704 | 512.322.6034

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**From:** Migl, Hayden [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, October 21, 2013 2:51 PM  
**To:** Cervenka, Marnie  
**Subject:** FW: Follow to Meeting on CEAP Pledges and Automatic Enrollment

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**From:** Carol Biedrzycki [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 10, 2013 11:08 AM  
**To:** Overton, Kerry; Randy Chapman; Ruby Roa [REDACTED] Lanetta Cooper  
**Cc:** Migl, Hayden  
**Subject:** Follow to Meeting on CEAP Pledges and Automatic Enrollment

Dear Kerry and JJ:

This email is to follow up on the meeting held at your offices on September 23rd at 11:30 a.m.. We (Carol Biedrzycki, Randall Chapman and Ruby Roa) met with you to discuss our concerns about Travis County not being able to pledge CEAP (Comprehensive Energy Assistance Program) funds to some Austin Energy customers with unpaid balances and automatic enrollment. Larry Weis joined us for most of the meeting.

After the meeting with you I talked to county staff. Randy asked me to get back with you for an update.

We believe the immediate issue is that AE allows 15 days for customers to pay half of the past due balance owed. Consistent with AE's policy, if the customer is unable to pay the balance in 15 days the customer's utilities are disconnected. This is inconsistent with AE's agreement with the county to provide electricity for 30 days when a pledge is made. Because AE is unable to provide service for 30 days in return for the pledge, the county cannot offer the pledge. This is contrary to the goal of CEAP to provide low-income households with uninterrupted utility service and contrary to city policy to make utilities affordable for all.

It is our understanding that a possible solution discussed is to give customers 45 instead of 15 days to pay half of the balance owed. What progress has been made in changing this policy? Why can't AE waive the policy for CEAP eligible customers? It would seem that making it impossible to receive

the pledge prevents AE from collecting revenue and increases the burden to pay on a customer who can't afford to pay. It is a lose-lose situation.

Other concerns we bring to your attention are:

- Additional time is an insufficient remedy for raising a large sum of money by a CEAP client who by definition is very low income.
- AE needs programs to help customers with balances due who are ineligible for CEAP but are still low-income.
- Customers and the general public do not have ready access to the policies being followed by AE.

Since our meeting, people with no resources to make their situation better have been disconnected. There are people just over the CEAP income limit living without electricity. What is Austin Energy going to do to provide power and help keep people in their homes?

At the meeting we provided a report from National Consumer Law Center on arrearage management programs in Massachusetts. This is the type of program needed to make sure AE's policies do not contribute to homelessness in the city. We also suggested that deferred payment plan payments be established based on the customer's ability to pay. What progress has been made toward providing these remedies?

At the end of the meeting we noted that automatic enrollment identified 15,699 additional CAP customers, more than doubling enrollment in the program. The program was expanded as part of the rate case for the specific purpose of providing rate relief to low-income customers who cannot afford the increase that went into effect last October.

The automatic enrollment system was to be implemented in April. We asked that the customers added to the program because of automatic enrollment be provided a retroactive benefit to April. There is precedent for such action as City Council required that retroactive benefits be provided to customers who were unfairly cut from the program earlier this year. Not being enrolled due to delays in the implementation of automatic enrollment is a similar situation. What plans does AE have for compensating these customers for benefits lost due to the delay in the implementation of automatic enrollment?

We look forward to hearing from you and would be happy to follow up with you in another in person meeting.

Carol Biedrzycki  
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