



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

January 24, 2025

The Honorable Timothy L. DeFoor  
Auditor General  
Department of the Auditor General  
229 Finance Building  
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

Dear Mr. DeFoor:

Thank you for your August 8, 2024 letter in which you provided the audit report titled Performance Audit Report, Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program. In accordance with your transmittal letter, this letter details the adoption of the recommendations contained in the audit report.

The finding and three recommendations, along with the Department of Human Services' (DHS') initial response and the status of the adoption of each recommendation, are listed below:

**Finding 1: DHS system errors and application processing mistakes caused improper LIHEAP benefit payments.**

**DHS Response:** DHS agrees with this finding. System failures, which have since been resolved, occurred on three occasions, leading to five errors during the audit period. Regarding the remainder of the errors, DHS' quality evaluators will continue reviewing for those errors and will reinforce correct processes with caseworkers.

**Recommendations for Finding 1:**

We recommend that DHS:

1. Ensure system maintenance updates do not disable controls that are designed to prevent improper LIHEAP benefit payments, or alter processes used to determine eligibility by enhancing pre-installation testing of routine maintenance updates.
2. Develop detailed procedures to determine the magnitude of payments impacted by identified system errors to fully diagnose and correct issues as timely as possible to ensure proper benefit payments are authorized.
3. Require caseworkers to obtain actual energy supplier charges before authorizing additional crisis payments and reinforce LIHEAP policies through caseworker training to ensure compliance.

**DHS Response to Recommendation 1:** DHS will review and enhance the system testing procedures to ensure the controls are not erroneously disabled in future system development life cycles. DHS will add regression testing scenarios to avoid deficiencies of this nature.

**Current Status:** The User Acceptance Testing team (a stakeholder function under Enterprise Case Management Development) has added additional regression scenarios into their testing plan and will continue to add scenarios as they are identified.

**DHS Response to Recommendation 2:** Benefit issuance reviews are a normal part of the County Assistance Offices' (CAOs') process for authorizing LIHEAP benefits. When an issue related to benefit issuance is identified, the CAO reports it through DHS' information technology system, known as ServiceNow. DHS researches all reported issues and tracks them for potential system deficiencies. If a deficiency is identified, a system bug is created and the issue is communicated to CAO staff by Daily Status or Emergency Messaging System postings.

**Current Status:** Communication has been provided to CAOs to review benefit issuances and report any discrepancies, to ensure that system issues can be identified and resolved timely so that correct benefits are issued.

**DHS Response to Recommendation 3:** DHS will detail this process in the LIHEAP User Manual and will reinforce procedures relating to authorizing multiple crisis approvals on the same case through annual training that will occur prior to the 2024-2025 LIHEAP season.

**Current Status:** The LIHEAP User Manual was updated September 2024, prior to the start of the 2024-2025 LIHEAP crisis season. The User Manual details the process for authorizing multiple crisis approvals on the same case and provides strict instructions against using override to approve crisis in this scenario. The 2024-2025 LIHEAP training sessions for DHS and CAO staff that took place prior to the LIHEAP crisis season also covered these instructions and emphasized that overrides should not be used in these scenarios.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update to our response to this audit report. Please contact Mr. David R. Bryan, Manager, Audit Resolution Section, Bureau of Financial Operations at (717) 783-7217, or via email at [davbryan@pa.gov](mailto:davbryan@pa.gov) if you have any questions regarding this matter.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Shell  
Deputy Secretary for Administration

- c: Ms. Janet B. Ciccocioppo, Department of the Auditor General  
Mr. Gordon R. Denlinger, Department of the Auditor General  
Mr. Scott D. King, Department of the Auditor General  
Mr. Mark Molnar, Department of the Auditor General  
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