



Inside Energy

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RE: DNREC Stalls Release of Evaluations of Low Income Assistance Program

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A recent federal study found as many as one third of American families may live in energy poverty, defined as energy bills exceeding 10 percent of their income. At least 30,000 families might qualify for the low income Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), a joint federal and state program to improve energy efficiency in homes by sealing air leaks, adding insulation, and installing LED light bulbs. I've worked on two working groups to identify needs and problems with this type of program.

The program has a history of problems. A federal audit of Delaware WAP projects found serious deficiencies in contractor performance in 2011. The entire program was shut down for two years while every project was re-inspected and the work re-done where needed. I recently decided to take a look at how things are going by studying reports the state division of Energy & Climate sends to the state Office of Management & Budget, and found concerns.

The state hires a sub-grantee to oversee the sub-contractors who actually perform the work. Unfortunately, the 2017 annual report does not include a line by line budget versus actual spending. However, I estimate, including an estimate of overhead at the sub-grantee, as much as 80 percent of the almost \$5 million budget was spent on overhead with only about 20% reaching families. The state may be spending over \$14,000 per home for a few hundred dollars a year in savings. It could take over 30 years to pay back the investment. About 300 families a year receive WAP assistance, but it appears if unspent funds had been used the number could have been doubled.

Apparently, DNREC suspects they can do better. They contracted for four different studies to be completed in 2017 to look for efficiencies in improving work flow, auditing, administrative costs, and to determine how much energy is actually being saved. My request for copies of those studies were denied. A similar request by Senate Minority Leader Gerald Hocker was also denied.

DNREC is claiming they cannot answer my request as I am a plaintiff in a lawsuit. While true, it has been many months since the date has passed to submit new evidence in the case, and Senator Hocker has no involvement in the case. My question is what is DNREC hiding? Comments can be sent to Senator Hocker at Gerald.Hocker@state.de.us .