

WEBVTT

1 00:00:00.420 --> 00:00:01.253 <v ->Good afternoon.</v>
2 00:00:01.253 --> 00:00:03.830 Thank you all for joining our town hall today.
3 00:00:03.830 --> 00:00:05.260 My name is Brenda Watson,
4 00:00:05.260 --> 00:00:08.070 Operation Fuel's Executive Director.
5 00:00:08.070 --> 00:00:11.610 For over 40 years, Operation Fuel has provided
6 00:00:11.610 --> 00:00:14.870 emergency energy utility assistance for those
struggling
7 00:00:14.870 --> 00:00:17.023 to keep up with the rising cost of energy.
8 00:00:17.900 --> 00:00:21.370 In addition to that, we studied energy burden
over the years
9 00:00:21.370 --> 00:00:23.370 so that we design and structure our programs
10 00:00:23.370 --> 00:00:25.200 to meet people where they are
11 00:00:25.200 --> 00:00:27.270 as it's critically important that their voices
12 00:00:27.270 --> 00:00:30.290 help guide how we structure our programs.
13 00:00:30.290 --> 00:00:32.790 We are also in the process of studying water
14 00:00:32.790 --> 00:00:34.910 and transportation cost burdens
15 00:00:34.910 --> 00:00:36.970 as these issues are all connected.
16 00:00:36.970 --> 00:00:39.620 Stay tuned to hear more about that study in
the fall.
17 00:00:40.660 --> 00:00:44.140 When Dr. Bozzi reached out in August, last
August,
18 00:00:44.140 --> 00:00:46.140 about a collaboration between Yale
19 00:00:46.140 --> 00:00:47.870 and the Vermont Law School,
20 00:00:47.870 --> 00:00:50.710 studying energy burden and insecurity in our
state,
21 00:00:50.710 --> 00:00:52.503 I was of course totally on board.
22 00:00:53.520 --> 00:00:56.020 On behalf of the Operation Fuel
23 00:00:56.020 --> 00:00:57.880 board of directors and staff,
24 00:00:57.880 --> 00:00:59.973 I want to thank Dr. Laura Bozzi,
25 00:01:01.405 --> 00:01:02.960 Director of Programs at the Yale Center
26 00:01:02.960 --> 00:01:04.660 for Climate Change and Health

27 00:01:04.660 --> 00:01:07.240 and faculty advisor on this project.

28 00:01:07.240 --> 00:01:12.240 I'd like to thank Erika Kim, Sarah Gledhill, Jhena Vigrass,

29 00:01:13.139 --> 00:01:17.400 Epongue Ekile, Kimberley Mashke

30 00:01:17.400 --> 00:01:18.880 and Olivia St. Pierre

31 00:01:18.880 --> 00:01:22.010 for their hard work and efforts on this project.

32 00:01:22.010 --> 00:01:25.270 I'd also like to thank Gannon Long, Kiana Stokes

33 00:01:25.270 --> 00:01:27.590 and Tanya Anderson of Operation Fuel

34 00:01:27.590 --> 00:01:28.690 for supporting this effort

35 00:01:28.690 --> 00:01:31.033 on top of the work they already do every day.

36 00:01:32.330 --> 00:01:34.620 And as we dive into this work you'll hear more

37 00:01:34.620 --> 00:01:36.891 about the process of planning

38 00:01:36.891 --> 00:01:39.300 that these focus groups was involved,

39 00:01:39.300 --> 00:01:42.920 the work that was involved in planning these focus groups

40 00:01:42.920 --> 00:01:45.250 and that this research study was evaluated

41 00:01:45.250 --> 00:01:48.740 and approved by Yale's Institutional Review Board.

42 00:01:48.740 --> 00:01:50.050 This approval meant that

43 00:01:50.050 --> 00:01:52.120 the study methods were deemed ethical

44 00:01:52.120 --> 00:01:55.320 and would not in any way harm participants.

45 00:01:55.320 --> 00:01:57.640 Please note that this survey is not being conducted

46 00:01:57.640 --> 00:02:00.400 on behalf of any energy supply company.

47 00:02:00.400 --> 00:02:02.540 All the information and feedback gathered

48 00:02:02.540 --> 00:02:05.060 are the voices of the participants.

49 00:02:05.060 --> 00:02:07.210 We look forward to a thoughtful discussion,

50 00:02:07.210 --> 00:02:08.960 but what I would love most

51 00:02:08.960 --> 00:02:11.590 is turning those thoughts into action.

52 00:02:11.590 --> 00:02:13.510 We encourage you to think about

53 00:02:13.510 --> 00:02:16.660 how you can hashtag use your power for good

54 00:02:16.660 --> 00:02:19.773 and keep the power on for the most vulnerable in our state.

55 00:02:20.720 --> 00:02:23.140 From here, I'd like to now turn it over to the students,

56 00:02:23.140 --> 00:02:26.143 Jhena, in particular, to take it away.

57 00:02:30.070 --> 00:02:31.770 <v ->Actually I will start.</v>

58 00:02:31.770 --> 00:02:33.747 So, my name is Epongue Ekile

59 00:02:33.747 --> 00:02:35.350 and I'm part of the student team

60 00:02:35.350 --> 00:02:36.700 that will be presenting today.

61 00:02:36.700 --> 00:02:38.250 And I'll also be the moderator.

62 00:02:40.150 --> 00:02:45.133 This slide will show the overview of our agenda for today.

63 00:02:46.490 --> 00:02:48.330 If someone could go to that

64 00:02:48.330 --> 00:02:51.240 and Brenda already gave an introduction.

65 00:02:51.240 --> 00:02:53.730 And so we have collaborated

66 00:02:53.730 --> 00:02:55.060 with Operation Fuel this semester

67 00:02:55.060 --> 00:02:57.720 to hold focus groups with Connecticut residents

68 00:02:57.720 --> 00:03:01.320 to speak about their experiences with energy insecurity.

69 00:03:01.320 --> 00:03:03.550 Just a reminder to everyone

70 00:03:03.550 --> 00:03:06.470 to please put yourself on mute if not speaking.

71 00:03:06.470 --> 00:03:09.140 And also please note that this presentation

72 00:03:09.140 --> 00:03:10.580 is being recorded.

73 00:03:10.580 --> 00:03:12.730 As questions come up, you can put them in the chat

74 00:03:12.730 --> 00:03:14.100 and I will keep an eye on that.

75 00:03:14.100 --> 00:03:16.500 As you can see, we will have a pause for questions

76 00:03:16.500 --> 00:03:18.010 part way through the presentation

77 00:03:18.010 --> 00:03:20.760 and again, at the end of the presentation.

78 00:03:20.760 --> 00:03:22.920 When we stop for question and answer,

79 00:03:22.920 --> 00:03:25.320 I'll take questions from the chat.

80 00:03:25.320 --> 00:03:27.633 And Jhena can start now.

81 00:03:29.440 --> 00:03:31.800 <v ->Great, thank you so much Epongue.</v>
82 00:03:31.800 --> 00:03:34.370 So thank you all so much for joining us
83 00:03:34.370 --> 00:03:36.500 for our presentation today about
84 00:03:36.500 --> 00:03:39.830 energy, justice and health in a changing climate.
85 00:03:39.830 --> 00:03:41.330 Our team consists of students
86 00:03:41.330 --> 00:03:43.460 from the Yale School of the Environment,
87 00:03:43.460 --> 00:03:46.690 Yale School of Public Health and Vermont Law
School.
88 00:03:46.690 --> 00:03:48.860 So today we'll start off with
89 00:03:48.860 --> 00:03:51.730 understanding why is energy important?
90 00:03:51.730 --> 00:03:53.290 It provides us with a lot of
91 00:03:53.290 --> 00:03:55.720 basic essential household services,
92 00:03:55.720 --> 00:03:59.870 like cooking, lighting, bathing, cleaning,
93 00:03:59.870 --> 00:04:01.800 heating, and cooling our houses
94 00:04:01.800 --> 00:04:05.620 and supporting life-sustaining medical devices.
95 00:04:05.620 --> 00:04:08.660 Energy insecurity can be defined in a variety
of ways,
96 00:04:08.660 --> 00:04:10.870 but in the literature it's been defined
97 00:04:10.870 --> 00:04:15.600 as the inability to meet these basic household
energy needs.
98 00:04:15.600 --> 00:04:18.800 And this can be expressed in either affordability
of energy
99 00:04:18.800 --> 00:04:23.283 or the reliability of having consistent access to
energy.
100 00:04:24.340 --> 00:04:28.770 Regarding affordability in the literature,
101 00:04:28.770 --> 00:04:30.380 it states that residents who spend
102 00:04:30.380 --> 00:04:33.230 above 6 to 10% of their income
103 00:04:33.230 --> 00:04:35.640 are considered energy burdened.
104 00:04:35.640 --> 00:04:37.840 And in Connecticut specifically, we have
105 00:04:37.840 --> 00:04:41.580 the highest retail electricity rate in the conti-
nental US,
106 00:04:41.580 --> 00:04:45.330 which is the price that residents pay for elec-
tricity

107 00:04:45.330 --> 00:04:47.390 and low income residents in the state

108 00:04:47.390 --> 00:04:52.390 can pay up to 26% of their income on household energy bills.

109 00:04:52.640 --> 00:04:55.900 We also experience frequent power outages in the state

110 00:04:55.900 --> 00:04:58.270 because of our aging power grid

111 00:04:58.270 --> 00:05:01.573 and it also being a heavily forested state.

112 00:05:02.510 --> 00:05:05.810 So our study aimed to focus on these issues in Connecticut

113 00:05:05.810 --> 00:05:07.550 and to hear residents stories

114 00:05:07.550 --> 00:05:10.060 and experiences with energy insecurity,

115 00:05:10.060 --> 00:05:12.420 as well as their thoughts on how to move forward

116 00:05:12.420 --> 00:05:15.280 and potential policy solutions.

117 00:05:15.280 --> 00:05:18.770 As a joint undertaking between Vermont Law School

118 00:05:18.770 --> 00:05:21.800 and Yale School of Public Health and Operation Fuel,

119 00:05:21.800 --> 00:05:23.870 we hope to bring these residents voices

120 00:05:23.870 --> 00:05:26.150 and lived experiences into the conversation

121 00:05:26.150 --> 00:05:28.543 around energy insecurity in Connecticut.

122 00:05:29.410 --> 00:05:30.663 Right, next slide please.

123 00:05:32.700 --> 00:05:36.470 So just an overview of the demographics of our participants.

124 00:05:36.470 --> 00:05:38.180 Over the course of about a month,

125 00:05:38.180 --> 00:05:43.130 we conducted 10 focus groups with 22 participants in total.

126 00:05:43.130 --> 00:05:47.470 Our participants ranged in age from 31 to 71,

127 00:05:47.470 --> 00:05:49.360 and about 30% reported that

128 00:05:49.360 --> 00:05:51.260 they do not have any air conditioning.

129 00:05:52.130 --> 00:05:53.990 The majority of our participants

130 00:05:53.990 --> 00:05:56.990 used electric or gas for their heating

131 00:05:56.990 --> 00:05:59.160 with about a quarter using oil.

132 00:05:59.160 --> 00:06:01.230 And while the majority of our participants
133 00:06:01.230 --> 00:06:02.740 lived in New Haven,
134 00:06:02.740 --> 00:06:05.660 we did interview residents from West Hartford,
135 00:06:05.660 --> 00:06:08.370 Berlin, Fairfield, East Haven,
136 00:06:08.370 --> 00:06:11.070 Stonington, Hamden and Windham.
137 00:06:11.070 --> 00:06:12.550 And finally, about two thirds
138 00:06:12.550 --> 00:06:14.860 of our participants identified as Black
139 00:06:14.860 --> 00:06:18.020 about a quarter of our participants identified
as White
140 00:06:18.020 --> 00:06:22.280 and 14% identified as Hispanic, Latinx.
141 00:06:22.280 --> 00:06:24.710 And now I will hand it off to my colleague,
Erika,
142 00:06:24.710 --> 00:06:26.010 to go through our methods.
143 00:06:33.690 --> 00:06:34.780 <v ->Okay, I'm unmuted now.</v>
144 00:06:34.780 --> 00:06:35.613 Thank you, Jhena.
145 00:06:35.613 --> 00:06:38.610 I will now be talking about our project method-
ology
146 00:06:38.610 --> 00:06:40.970 and kind of what we did for this study.
147 00:06:40.970 --> 00:06:44.070 So, like Brenda mentioned in the beginning,
148 00:06:44.070 --> 00:06:48.970 our study was reviewed and approved by the
IRB at Yale.
149 00:06:48.970 --> 00:06:52.230 So it was deemed an ethical and safe study.
150 00:06:52.230 --> 00:06:55.350 Partnering with our community partners at
Operation Fuel,
151 00:06:55.350 --> 00:06:57.960 as well as some community liaison partners
152 00:06:57.960 --> 00:06:59.570 throughout the state of Connecticut.
153 00:06:59.570 --> 00:07:01.290 We worked to recruit participants
154 00:07:01.290 --> 00:07:03.580 throughout the state to participate
155 00:07:03.580 --> 00:07:06.800 in a series of focus groups about energy costs.
156 00:07:06.800 --> 00:07:09.100 And so, because our project was rooted
157 00:07:09.100 --> 00:07:11.450 in community-based research principles,
158 00:07:11.450 --> 00:07:14.270 we often conferred with Operation Fuel

159 00:07:14.270 --> 00:07:15.500 throughout the study design
160 00:07:15.500 --> 00:07:18.140 to obtain feedback, guidance and input,
161 00:07:18.140 --> 00:07:20.250 kind of every step of the way of what we were
doing.
162 00:07:20.250 --> 00:07:21.980 And that's what's demonstrated
163 00:07:21.980 --> 00:07:25.110 via the flow chart on the right-hand side.
164 00:07:25.110 --> 00:07:28.050 Our focus group questions explored three main
topics.
165 00:07:28.050 --> 00:07:30.920 So, perspective surrounding energy insecurity,
166 00:07:30.920 --> 00:07:33.180 knowledge of energy assistance programs,
167 00:07:33.180 --> 00:07:35.170 kind of what exists out there,
168 00:07:35.170 --> 00:07:37.750 whether or not people have utilized these
programs,
169 00:07:37.750 --> 00:07:38.830 things like that.
170 00:07:38.830 --> 00:07:41.220 And then also knowledge about weatherization
171 00:07:41.220 --> 00:07:43.840 and energy-efficiency solutions.
172 00:07:43.840 --> 00:07:46.070 And after we conducted these focus groups,
173 00:07:46.070 --> 00:07:47.900 we took the transcripts.
174 00:07:47.900 --> 00:07:50.240 So everything that was said during these focus
groups
175 00:07:50.240 --> 00:07:52.943 and we analyzed them and we created,
176 00:07:54.350 --> 00:07:57.360 we identified major themes in those transcripts
177 00:07:57.360 --> 00:08:00.320 and those became what we call key domains.
178 00:08:00.320 --> 00:08:03.650 And so, our key domains that we'll be talking
about
179 00:08:03.650 --> 00:08:06.360 in the following slides are health factors,
180 00:08:06.360 --> 00:08:09.920 social dynamics, financial strategies and cop-
ing mechanisms,
181 00:08:09.920 --> 00:08:12.180 environmental factors and building concerns
182 00:08:12.180 --> 00:08:14.920 and assistance channels and accessibility.
183 00:08:14.920 --> 00:08:18.313 And with that, I will pass it on to my colleague,
Olivia.
184 00:08:22.350 --> 00:08:23.183 <v ->Hi everyone.</v>

185 00:08:23.183 --> 00:08:25.870 So I'm gonna share some general findings
186 00:08:25.870 --> 00:08:28.670 about the health factors.
187 00:08:28.670 --> 00:08:32.680 So to start us off, we found a general finding
188 00:08:32.680 --> 00:08:35.750 that participants with medical vulnerability
189 00:08:35.750 --> 00:08:37.060 experienced a higher burden
190 00:08:37.060 --> 00:08:39.440 when navigating energy insecurity.
191 00:08:39.440 --> 00:08:41.780 Many of the participants shared the sentiment
192 00:08:41.780 --> 00:08:44.270 that access to reliable and affordable energy
193 00:08:44.270 --> 00:08:48.070 should be universally accessible, and protected,
194 00:08:48.070 --> 00:08:51.270 regardless of whether one has a medical condition or not.
195 00:08:51.270 --> 00:08:53.490 And participants shared that in general,
196 00:08:53.490 --> 00:08:55.260 their reliance on refrigeration
197 00:08:55.260 --> 00:08:58.630 impacts their nutritional choices, their health,
198 00:08:58.630 --> 00:09:00.780 and several participants shared that
199 00:09:00.780 --> 00:09:04.090 they require refrigeration to store medications
200 00:09:04.090 --> 00:09:06.223 and specially-prescribed diets.
201 00:09:09.420 --> 00:09:12.090 You can go to the next slide, thank you.
202 00:09:12.090 --> 00:09:14.560 We also found that folks with medical conditions
203 00:09:14.560 --> 00:09:17.360 are especially vulnerable to shutoffs
204 00:09:17.360 --> 00:09:18.670 and extreme weather events
205 00:09:18.670 --> 00:09:20.980 because they rely on electricity
206 00:09:20.980 --> 00:09:23.360 to regulate the temperature in their homes
207 00:09:23.360 --> 00:09:25.510 for management of a medical condition,
208 00:09:25.510 --> 00:09:28.780 and often rely on it for medical devices
209 00:09:28.780 --> 00:09:30.980 like nebulizers, CPAP machines,
210 00:09:30.980 --> 00:09:33.123 oxygen and cardiac monitoring.
211 00:09:35.320 --> 00:09:37.890 And the utility companies do offer,
212 00:09:37.890 --> 00:09:39.470 you can stay on that last slide.
213 00:09:39.470 --> 00:09:41.830 The utility companies do offer protections

214 00:09:41.830 --> 00:09:45.470 from shutoff in limited cases of serious illness

215 00:09:45.470 --> 00:09:48.820 and life-threatening conditions when documented,

216 00:09:48.820 --> 00:09:51.320 but participants shared frustrations

217 00:09:51.320 --> 00:09:54.560 with the limitations of these structural safeguards.

218 00:09:54.560 --> 00:09:58.070 They also expressed frustrations

219 00:09:58.070 --> 00:10:00.870 with navigating the paperwork

220 00:10:00.870 --> 00:10:02.380 associated with the protections

221 00:10:02.380 --> 00:10:06.370 if they're not regularly seen by a primary physician.

222 00:10:06.370 --> 00:10:07.203 Next slide.

223 00:10:10.070 --> 00:10:14.760 We also found that health factors,

224 00:10:14.760 --> 00:10:17.740 financial stress and shutoffs

225 00:10:17.740 --> 00:10:20.810 compound anxiety and mental health.

226 00:10:20.810 --> 00:10:23.350 So participants shared that the stress of high bills

227 00:10:23.350 --> 00:10:26.430 also manifests through physical sickness.

228 00:10:26.430 --> 00:10:29.170 Additionally, high energy cost burdens

229 00:10:29.170 --> 00:10:32.350 lead participants to having to make difficult decisions

230 00:10:32.350 --> 00:10:34.290 between health and electricity.

231 00:10:34.290 --> 00:10:37.910 So this includes choosing to visit the doctors less,

232 00:10:37.910 --> 00:10:41.200 struggling to keep a vehicle as a handicapped person,

233 00:10:41.200 --> 00:10:43.970 who relies on transportation for medical needs,

234 00:10:43.970 --> 00:10:46.380 and choosing not to purchase certain medications

235 00:10:46.380 --> 00:10:48.020 or medical equipments in order

236 00:10:48.020 --> 00:10:51.200 to prioritize paying the energy bill.

237 00:10:51.200 --> 00:10:53.827 So this quote on the side here says,

238 00:10:53.827 --> 00:10:57.580 "Facing high bills is anxiety inducing. It just is.

239 00:10:57.580 --> 00:10:59.790 It makes me sick. I'm considering
 240 00:10:59.790 --> 00:11:02.370 just living in the dark for some months."
 241 00:11:02.370 --> 00:11:03.977 And then another participant said,
 242 00:11:03.977 --> 00:11:06.040 "It stresses me out. I lose sleep
 243 00:11:06.040 --> 00:11:07.080 because I'm worrying about
 244 00:11:07.080 --> 00:11:09.660 how I'm going to pay for these lights and gas.
 245 00:11:09.660 --> 00:11:11.310 It's scary because once you've had
 246 00:11:11.310 --> 00:11:13.200 your lights turned out once before,
 247 00:11:13.200 --> 00:11:15.130 that's what you're looking forward to again,
 248 00:11:15.130 --> 00:11:16.780 if you don't pay the lights."
 249 00:11:16.780 --> 00:11:17.613 Next slide.
 250 00:11:22.420 --> 00:11:23.770 One of the next domains
 251 00:11:23.770 --> 00:11:26.890 that we explored was social dynamics.
 252 00:11:26.890 --> 00:11:30.430 So, we found that one's navigation
 253 00:11:30.430 --> 00:11:34.210 of familial, residential, social and faith rela-
 tionships
 254 00:11:34.210 --> 00:11:38.010 may all impact experiences with energy inse-
 curity.
 255 00:11:38.010 --> 00:11:40.020 Even if assistance is accessible,
 256 00:11:40.020 --> 00:11:42.810 a sense of pride, embarrassment and awareness
 257 00:11:42.810 --> 00:11:45.140 of stigmas tied to poverty and disability
 258 00:11:45.140 --> 00:11:48.000 can be an obstacle for seeking help
 259 00:11:48.000 --> 00:11:51.440 or talking openly about their experiences
 260 00:11:51.440 --> 00:11:53.350 with energy insecurity.
 261 00:11:53.350 --> 00:11:56.610 Participants also reported feeling shame and
 stigma
 262 00:11:56.610 --> 00:11:59.350 around not being able to pay energy bills.
 263 00:11:59.350 --> 00:12:01.810 Parents specifically expressed a difficulty
 264 00:12:01.810 --> 00:12:03.600 in navigating conversations
 265 00:12:03.600 --> 00:12:06.300 about energy insecurity with their children.
 266 00:12:06.300 --> 00:12:08.750 And participants in general, also shared wor-
 ries

267 00:12:08.750 --> 00:12:10.370 about being a burden on their family

268 00:12:10.370 --> 00:12:13.053 when needing to rely on family for assistance.

269 00:12:14.400 --> 00:12:17.770 Our participants also resonated with feelings of isolation

270 00:12:17.770 --> 00:12:20.350 throughout the COVID-19 pandemic

271 00:12:20.350 --> 00:12:22.060 and shared that during hard times,

272 00:12:22.060 --> 00:12:23.540 whether that's due to shut off,

273 00:12:23.540 --> 00:12:25.970 extreme weather events or pandemic

274 00:12:25.970 --> 00:12:27.470 that their neighbors and landlords

275 00:12:27.470 --> 00:12:32.470 made their residential communities either better or worse

276 00:12:33.390 --> 00:12:35.170 and definitely impacted their perception

277 00:12:35.170 --> 00:12:36.950 of feeling supported.

278 00:12:36.950 --> 00:12:39.570 So, there's some quotes on the side there

279 00:12:41.650 --> 00:12:46.420 about living in shutoff and extreme weather events.

280 00:12:46.420 --> 00:12:49.020 And I have one more that I'd like to read out loud,

281 00:12:49.020 --> 00:12:51.637 which is what one participant shared,

282 00:12:51.637 --> 00:12:53.710 "Luckily I had my mother to help me out,

283 00:12:53.710 --> 00:12:56.820 but it's still very stressful having to rely on people,

284 00:12:56.820 --> 00:12:58.530 having to live in the dark,

285 00:12:58.530 --> 00:13:00.030 having to explain to your child

286 00:13:00.030 --> 00:13:02.660 why you're living in the dark and it stays with you.

287 00:13:02.660 --> 00:13:04.720 I think I made a vow of myself back then

288 00:13:04.720 --> 00:13:06.430 that I was never gonna let myself

289 00:13:06.430 --> 00:13:07.940 get in that situation again

290 00:13:07.940 --> 00:13:10.080 and knock on wood I've kept that."

291 00:13:10.080 --> 00:13:13.863 And I will pass it back to Epongue, our moderator.

292 00:13:15.680 --> 00:13:17.730 <v ->Great. Thank you, Olivia.</v>

293 00:13:17.730 --> 00:13:19.800 Thanks to everyone who's presented so far.

294 00:13:19.800 --> 00:13:22.580 So, we have a lot of information today.

295 00:13:22.580 --> 00:13:25.250 So we wanted to pause here for questions

296 00:13:25.250 --> 00:13:29.140 for about 10 minutes before we finish the presentation.

297 00:13:29.140 --> 00:13:32.520 After this break, we'll present on financial strategies,

298 00:13:32.520 --> 00:13:35.620 coping mechanisms, environmental factors,

299 00:13:35.620 --> 00:13:38.940 building maintenance concerns and assistance channels.

300 00:13:38.940 --> 00:13:43.033 So please feel free to add your question in the chat now.

301 00:14:37.970 --> 00:14:40.550 Okay, so we have a question.

302 00:14:40.550 --> 00:14:42.990 Did we have people with limited English

303 00:14:42.990 --> 00:14:44.433 in our focus groups?

304 00:14:46.090 --> 00:14:49.583 If anyone from the team wants to answer that.

305 00:14:56.040 --> 00:15:00.430 <v ->So we did have the ability to do focus groups in Spanish,</v>

306 00:15:00.430 --> 00:15:04.690 but we didn't get any interest in that.

307 00:15:04.690 --> 00:15:07.373 So all the focus groups were conducting in English.

308 00:15:11.387 --> 00:15:14.120 <v ->"Did individuals find that fuel assistance</v>

309 00:15:14.120 --> 00:15:18.407 relieved or added stress around the issue of shame?"

310 00:15:23.120 --> 00:15:24.280 A very good question.

311 00:15:24.280 --> 00:15:25.853 If anyone else wants to answer.

312 00:15:29.080 --> 00:15:31.160 <v ->I can take a first pass at that.</v>

313 00:15:31.160 --> 00:15:34.210 And then if any of my colleagues have anything to add,

314 00:15:34.210 --> 00:15:35.320 please feel free.

315 00:15:35.320 --> 00:15:38.180 So, my sense from the focus groups

316 00:15:38.180 --> 00:15:40.110 that I participated in was that

317 00:15:40.110 --> 00:15:43.910 receiving assistance did add a bit

318 00:15:43.910 --> 00:15:45.890 to the feeling of shame and stress,
 319 00:15:45.890 --> 00:15:48.120 especially if people were receiving assistance
 320 00:15:48.120 --> 00:15:51.830 from family members or some also said
 321 00:15:51.830 --> 00:15:55.140 that they essentially borrowed from their
 themselves.
 322 00:15:55.140 --> 00:15:58.610 So, like taking loans from their
 323 00:15:58.610 --> 00:16:01.410 own savings or retirement accounts.
 324 00:16:01.410 --> 00:16:04.360 And so, there was this sense of
 325 00:16:04.360 --> 00:16:05.860 needing to pay themselves back
 326 00:16:05.860 --> 00:16:09.130 or needing to pay family members back
 327 00:16:09.130 --> 00:16:11.620 or community members back and feeling a
 sense
 328 00:16:11.620 --> 00:16:14.623 of stress around that experience.
 329 00:16:24.490 --> 00:16:27.260 <v ->Yeah, I think that pretty much sums it
 up for all of us</v>
 330 00:16:27.260 --> 00:16:29.273 that participated in the focus groups.
 331 00:16:32.600 --> 00:16:36.340 "How were the focus groups designed?"
 332 00:16:36.340 --> 00:16:38.140 I think, Erika, you can answer that.
 333 00:16:39.810 --> 00:16:41.280 <v ->Sure, yeah.</v>
 334 00:16:41.280 --> 00:16:45.350 So, in terms of how we designed the focus
 group questions,
 335 00:16:45.350 --> 00:16:48.970 so what we were going to ask and base our
 focus groups on,
 336 00:16:48.970 --> 00:16:53.950 this project has been an ongoing thing for the
 past year.
 337 00:16:53.950 --> 00:16:58.393 So prior to, just when we started these in
 February.
 338 00:16:58.393 --> 00:17:03.230 What was done by our energy justice team
 last year was
 339 00:17:04.510 --> 00:17:06.840 we conducted like a literature review.
 340 00:17:06.840 --> 00:17:11.650 So we looked for all existing pieces of research
 341 00:17:11.650 --> 00:17:14.380 or other forms of literature
 342 00:17:14.380 --> 00:17:18.160 that looked at energy insecurity in Connecti-
 cut.

343 00:17:18.160 --> 00:17:20.800 What the team found was that there is not much

344 00:17:20.800 --> 00:17:22.810 and what the team basically concluded

345 00:17:22.810 --> 00:17:26.270 is that there is a really strong need for us

346 00:17:26.270 --> 00:17:28.400 to actually go out and ask people

347 00:17:28.400 --> 00:17:30.130 about their experiences with paying

348 00:17:30.130 --> 00:17:31.743 for energy bills in this state.

349 00:17:32.940 --> 00:17:34.750 And so, that literature review is kind of

350 00:17:34.750 --> 00:17:37.170 what informed the questions we decided to ask.

351 00:17:37.170 --> 00:17:41.070 And the three major topic areas that we decided to focus on.

352 00:17:41.070 --> 00:17:44.700 And as for conducting the focus groups in general,

353 00:17:44.700 --> 00:17:48.990 so we spent a bit of time making connections

354 00:17:48.990 --> 00:17:51.730 with different community liaisons throughout the state

355 00:17:51.730 --> 00:17:54.930 who kind of had their own little social networks.

356 00:17:54.930 --> 00:17:59.500 And through those networks, we recruited our participants.

357 00:17:59.500 --> 00:18:02.030 So we aimed to recruit a bunch of people

358 00:18:02.030 --> 00:18:04.020 from different communities, urban,

359 00:18:04.020 --> 00:18:06.073 suburban and rural throughout the state.

360 00:18:07.690 --> 00:18:09.330 And that's kind of how we got

361 00:18:09.330 --> 00:18:11.493 into contact with our participants.

362 00:18:16.300 --> 00:18:19.757 <v ->Great, next question.</v>

363 00:18:19.757 --> 00:18:23.730 "Is there a one-stop or go-to list

364 00:18:23.730 --> 00:18:26.320 of energy, water assistance resources

365 00:18:26.320 --> 00:18:29.260 in English and in Spanish that could be available

366 00:18:29.260 --> 00:18:32.860 and are all of the state's health departments

367 00:18:32.860 --> 00:18:34.277 aware and involved?"

368 00:18:39.470 --> 00:18:41.450 <v ->I can also take a first stab at this.</v>
 369 00:18:41.450 --> 00:18:43.644 So, from our understanding,
 370 00:18:43.644 --> 00:18:48.040 there is not a one-stop, go-to list.
 371 00:18:48.040 --> 00:18:49.790 We know that that would be really helpful.
 372 00:18:49.790 --> 00:18:51.400 And that was one of our goals
 373 00:18:51.400 --> 00:18:53.390 for this project for this semester.
 374 00:18:53.390 --> 00:18:54.770 Unfortunately, I don't think
 375 00:18:54.770 --> 00:18:56.970 we have the time to put that together,
 376 00:18:56.970 --> 00:18:59.890 but potentially, this project will continue
 377 00:18:59.890 --> 00:19:01.150 over the summer a bit.
 378 00:19:01.150 --> 00:19:03.450 And so, the person who will take that on
 379 00:19:03.450 --> 00:19:05.360 may be able to work on it.
 380 00:19:05.360 --> 00:19:10.250 But that has seemed like a major need for
 this area,
 381 00:19:10.250 --> 00:19:12.010 but also requires a lot of maintenance.
 382 00:19:12.010 --> 00:19:15.780 So, just to make sure that the list is up to
 date.
 383 00:19:15.780 --> 00:19:18.570 And so, it does require
 384 00:19:18.570 --> 00:19:22.910 staff time and funding to maintain that,
 385 00:19:22.910 --> 00:19:26.170 which obviously is difficult in this area.
 386 00:19:26.170 --> 00:19:28.770 And then the health departments,
 387 00:19:28.770 --> 00:19:33.290 I'm not sure if they are coordinated
 388 00:19:33.290 --> 00:19:36.840 and I'm not sure if Brenda or Gannon from
 Operation Fuel
 389 00:19:36.840 --> 00:19:39.683 would want to answer that question.
 390 00:19:41.560 --> 00:19:45.160 <v ->Hi, Brenda here, as far as health de-
 partments go,</v>
 391 00:19:45.160 --> 00:19:48.560 I am unsure of their awareness around these
 issues.
 392 00:19:48.560 --> 00:19:51.290 I do know that DSS is the administrator
 393 00:19:51.290 --> 00:19:54.140 of the state's energy assistance program.
 394 00:19:54.140 --> 00:19:55.323 So they're aware.

395 00:19:56.290 --> 00:19:59.890 And the Department of DCF,
 396 00:19:59.890 --> 00:20:01.800 Department of Children and Families,
 397 00:20:01.800 --> 00:20:04.580 they actually have a program
 398 00:20:04.580 --> 00:20:07.510 in which if they are interacting with a family
 399 00:20:07.510 --> 00:20:10.180 who's struggling with energy burden,
 400 00:20:10.180 --> 00:20:14.520 they have funding set aside that will help pay
 down a bill
 401 00:20:14.520 --> 00:20:19.520 or make a delivery of oil or other types of fuel
 402 00:20:19.570 --> 00:20:23.290 if that would help that family avoid a situation
 403 00:20:23.290 --> 00:20:25.130 where the child needs to be removed.
 404 00:20:25.130 --> 00:20:29.740 I also, one other piece, not necessarily health
 departments,
 405 00:20:29.740 --> 00:20:33.070 but Hartford Hospital in particular,
 406 00:20:33.070 --> 00:20:35.310 they have social workers on staff
 407 00:20:35.310 --> 00:20:37.690 and they're aware of Operation Fuel.
 408 00:20:37.690 --> 00:20:39.300 They're probably aware of
 409 00:20:39.300 --> 00:20:42.180 the state's energy assistance program as well.
 410 00:20:42.180 --> 00:20:44.420 And they do try to connect families
 411 00:20:44.420 --> 00:20:46.860 who are discharging from the hospital,
 412 00:20:46.860 --> 00:20:51.860 if there's a vulnerable family member in the
 home,
 413 00:20:52.560 --> 00:20:54.490 and there's no power in the home.
 414 00:20:54.490 --> 00:20:57.670 They will try to connect that family
 415 00:20:57.670 --> 00:21:02.670 with one of the programs or perhaps even
 both,
 416 00:21:03.170 --> 00:21:05.620 Operation Fuel and the state's energy assis-
 tance.
 417 00:21:10.290 --> 00:21:13.750 <v ->Great, I think there's another question
 later in the chat</v>
 418 00:21:13.750 --> 00:21:17.210 that is kind related to this for the resource
 list,
 419 00:21:17.210 --> 00:21:20.480 are the utility support supposed to supply
 this

420 00:21:20.480 --> 00:21:25.480 or should the EnergizeCT website should that be updated?

421 00:21:33.970 --> 00:21:35.633 <v ->I think, yes.</v>

422 00:21:39.110 --> 00:21:43.673 I think websites should be updated perhaps all the time.

423 00:21:44.780 --> 00:21:47.480 This environment is constantly changing.

424 00:21:47.480 --> 00:21:49.780 Program dates are constantly changing

425 00:21:49.780 --> 00:21:52.360 and requirements change.

426 00:21:52.360 --> 00:21:57.010 So, anytime you can utilize your resource,

427 00:21:57.010 --> 00:22:01.680 which is a website to update folks on programs

428 00:22:01.680 --> 00:22:04.330 that are available to them, then yes,

429 00:22:04.330 --> 00:22:08.800 the EnergizeCT website could use a bit of a makeover

430 00:22:08.800 --> 00:22:10.260 to address these issues,

431 00:22:10.260 --> 00:22:13.233 and inform people of the programs that are available.

432 00:22:16.630 --> 00:22:18.150 <v ->And if I could just add to that.</v>

433 00:22:18.150 --> 00:22:21.750 Thank you to Stephanie Cohan from Connecticut PURA,

434 00:22:21.750 --> 00:22:23.300 the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority.

435 00:22:23.300 --> 00:22:27.080 And she's put in the chat, a website that does lay out

436 00:22:27.080 --> 00:22:30.620 some of the utility assistance programs available to folks.

437 00:22:30.620 --> 00:22:32.770 So, folks can see that in the chat as well.

438 00:22:38.100 --> 00:22:40.943 <v ->Great, you can answer a few more questions.</v>

439 00:22:42.440 --> 00:22:43.653 Let's see.

440 00:22:48.607 --> 00:22:50.650 "Was there anyone on our team

441 00:22:50.650 --> 00:22:52.960 that have experienced some of these hardships

442 00:22:52.960 --> 00:22:55.210 and could therefore relate to the residents?"

443 00:22:58.570 --> 00:23:01.413 <v ->I'm happy to take a stab at this answer.</v>

444 00:23:03.310 --> 00:23:06.900 So, I'm not from Connecticut originally.

445 00:23:06.900 --> 00:23:11.280 In terms of electricity costs, I come from the state

446 00:23:11.280 --> 00:23:14.590 that has, I think, the highest residential electricity costs

447 00:23:14.590 --> 00:23:16.590 in the nation, which is Hawaii.

448 00:23:16.590 --> 00:23:20.770 And so, for all my life, like my family's utility bills

449 00:23:20.770 --> 00:23:22.190 our electricity bills were like

450 00:23:22.190 --> 00:23:24.620 hundreds and hundreds of dollars every single month.

451 00:23:24.620 --> 00:23:27.040 And my family was just in like mounds of debt,

452 00:23:27.040 --> 00:23:28.770 my whole life because of this.

453 00:23:28.770 --> 00:23:31.510 And so, when we were listening in these focus groups

454 00:23:31.510 --> 00:23:34.280 to our participants talk about their experiences,

455 00:23:34.280 --> 00:23:35.690 not only paying for electricity,

456 00:23:35.690 --> 00:23:38.310 but also heat, gas, things like that,

457 00:23:38.310 --> 00:23:39.543 and it all adding up.

458 00:23:40.480 --> 00:23:42.800 Yeah, I was definitely able to relate

459 00:23:42.800 --> 00:23:46.870 and I have never used,

460 00:23:46.870 --> 00:23:48.170 had to use gas or heat

461 00:23:48.170 --> 00:23:51.340 coming from a tropical environment it's hot there,

462 00:23:51.340 --> 00:23:52.480 so we don't need heat.

463 00:23:52.480 --> 00:23:55.300 And so, that was like another perspective

464 00:23:55.300 --> 00:23:58.940 that I just didn't even know about.

465 00:23:58.940 --> 00:24:02.420 And it was a great experience and really emotional,

466 00:24:02.420 --> 00:24:05.563 like being able to listen to these experiences.

467 00:24:09.990 --> 00:24:10.823 <v ->Great.</v>

468 00:24:13.870 --> 00:24:15.800 All right, I think we can move on.

469 00:24:15.800 --> 00:24:19.130 There are a lot of questions still in the chat

470 00:24:19.130 --> 00:24:23.180 and we will try to get through all of them
 471 00:24:23.180 --> 00:24:25.430 towards the end of the presentation,
 472 00:24:25.430 --> 00:24:28.080 but thank you to everyone who's submitted a
 question.
 473 00:24:32.250 --> 00:24:34.980 All right so, I'll pass it on to Kim
 474 00:24:34.980 --> 00:24:38.453 for financial strategies and coping mechanisms.
 475 00:24:40.440 --> 00:24:41.470 <v ->Yeah thanks, Epongue.</v>
 476 00:24:41.470 --> 00:24:44.590 So, our next category we'd like to discuss,
 477 00:24:44.590 --> 00:24:46.990 is financial strategies and coping mechanisms,
 478 00:24:46.990 --> 00:24:50.440 which essentially covers the various strategic
 approaches
 479 00:24:50.440 --> 00:24:52.410 that our participants took in order
 480 00:24:52.410 --> 00:24:55.060 to make ends meet directly with energy costs
 481 00:24:55.060 --> 00:24:56.720 as well as to balance energy costs
 482 00:24:56.720 --> 00:24:59.590 in the greater scheme of financial constraints.
 483 00:24:59.590 --> 00:25:03.590 So our participants are extremely aware of
 and concerned
 484 00:25:03.590 --> 00:25:06.420 about how much energy they use at all times.
 485 00:25:06.420 --> 00:25:08.440 And they are constantly going out of their
 way
 486 00:25:08.440 --> 00:25:10.360 to reduce their consumption.
 487 00:25:10.360 --> 00:25:12.520 So many have developed a habit of unplugging
 488 00:25:12.520 --> 00:25:14.960 as many appliances as possible.
 489 00:25:14.960 --> 00:25:18.220 And some also avoid transportation as much
 as possible
 490 00:25:18.220 --> 00:25:20.750 and many avoid using energy during peak
 times
 491 00:25:20.750 --> 00:25:21.860 during the evening.
 492 00:25:21.860 --> 00:25:23.960 And often cook during off peak hours
 493 00:25:23.960 --> 00:25:25.330 or minimize their comfort
 494 00:25:25.330 --> 00:25:27.503 by going the entire day without heat.
 495 00:25:28.730 --> 00:25:31.420 Paying for energy costs often affects
 496 00:25:31.420 --> 00:25:34.090 our participant's ability to afford other bills

497 00:25:34.090 --> 00:25:36.670 and build up any sort of savings.
498 00:25:36.670 --> 00:25:39.410 So some are unable to save for retirement,
499 00:25:39.410 --> 00:25:42.120 while others are unable to afford more immediate
500 00:25:42.120 --> 00:25:44.400 and urgent costs such as doctor's visits,
501 00:25:44.400 --> 00:25:46.803 rent or other utility bills.
502 00:25:47.860 --> 00:25:49.800 Sometimes known as heat or eat.
503 00:25:49.800 --> 00:25:51.750 Some participants were very transparent
504 00:25:51.750 --> 00:25:54.600 about sharing very challenging experiences,
505 00:25:54.600 --> 00:25:57.530 being faced with a choice to purchase food
506 00:25:57.530 --> 00:26:00.870 or pay for energy as illustrated by the top quote,
507 00:26:00.870 --> 00:26:03.180 on the right-hand side of the slide.
508 00:26:03.180 --> 00:26:05.240 Some sought out stores with cheaper prices
509 00:26:05.240 --> 00:26:07.600 or supplemented with multiple food banks.
510 00:26:07.600 --> 00:26:10.130 And one participant who had a young child,
511 00:26:10.130 --> 00:26:13.290 ultimately chose to pay for the energy bill one month
512 00:26:13.290 --> 00:26:15.163 instead of buying groceries.
513 00:26:17.190 --> 00:26:20.700 Participants often feel on the edge of debt
514 00:26:20.700 --> 00:26:23.000 in balancing so many costs at once.
515 00:26:23.000 --> 00:26:25.750 Some feel vulnerable to sudden budget increases.
516 00:26:25.750 --> 00:26:27.810 So for example, a homeowner was concerned
517 00:26:27.810 --> 00:26:29.790 about property tax increases,
518 00:26:29.790 --> 00:26:32.130 and one renter spoke to a particularly
519 00:26:32.130 --> 00:26:33.910 financially strained time
520 00:26:33.910 --> 00:26:36.080 when her oldest child was heading to college
521 00:26:36.080 --> 00:26:38.520 and she also needed to pay for transportation
522 00:26:38.520 --> 00:26:39.660 to visit another child
523 00:26:39.660 --> 00:26:41.873 who was incarcerated at the time as well.

524 00:26:43.720 --> 00:26:46.690 And mistrust of the utility was often a strong sentiment

525 00:26:46.690 --> 00:26:48.510 expressed by multiple people

526 00:26:48.510 --> 00:26:50.080 as demonstrated by the bottom quote

527 00:26:50.080 --> 00:26:52.120 on the right-hand side of the slide.

528 00:26:52.120 --> 00:26:54.760 For some, it is very difficult to comprehend

529 00:26:54.760 --> 00:26:57.730 how successful utility businesses

530 00:26:57.730 --> 00:27:00.530 that provides such essential services as energy

531 00:27:00.530 --> 00:27:02.440 could possibly need to charge

532 00:27:02.440 --> 00:27:04.830 such unaffordable bills to consumers.

533 00:27:04.830 --> 00:27:07.330 And why regularly putting an active effort

534 00:27:07.330 --> 00:27:10.700 towards limiting consumption doesn't seem to successfully

535 00:27:10.700 --> 00:27:13.053 lower the bill amount for our participants.

536 00:27:14.210 --> 00:27:15.263 Next slide please.

537 00:27:18.180 --> 00:27:20.830 So the environmental factors category specifically covers

538 00:27:20.830 --> 00:27:24.740 our participants' experiences related to season and weather.

539 00:27:24.740 --> 00:27:26.050 Hazardous temperatures during

540 00:27:26.050 --> 00:27:29.100 both summer and winter caused discomfort.

541 00:27:29.100 --> 00:27:32.370 Temperatures also often directly related to health.

542 00:27:32.370 --> 00:27:34.250 And a few people spoke to air conditioning

543 00:27:34.250 --> 00:27:37.070 as an essential resource for managing asthma.

544 00:27:37.070 --> 00:27:39.060 And one person mentioned taking a medication

545 00:27:39.060 --> 00:27:40.910 that causes temperature sensitivity,

546 00:27:40.910 --> 00:27:43.620 and therefore requires a temperature-controlled

547 00:27:43.620 --> 00:27:45.280 living environment.

548 00:27:45.280 --> 00:27:46.870 One participant spoke to feeling

549 00:27:46.870 --> 00:27:50.060 like coping strategies were a lose/lose situation.

550 00:27:50.060 --> 00:27:52.060 And during the summer she opened the blinds

551 00:27:52.060 --> 00:27:55.120 in order to avoid using electricity during the day.

552 00:27:55.120 --> 00:27:57.730 But having the blinds open caused the room to heat up,

553 00:27:57.730 --> 00:27:59.963 which created a need for air conditioning.

554 00:28:01.960 --> 00:28:04.720 Anticipation of power outages from severe weather events

555 00:28:04.720 --> 00:28:07.280 or other interruptions is stressful,

556 00:28:07.280 --> 00:28:10.520 especially because the ability to store perishable food

557 00:28:10.520 --> 00:28:13.580 is dependent on electricity for refrigeration.

558 00:28:13.580 --> 00:28:15.230 Food spoilage can be a disaster

559 00:28:15.230 --> 00:28:16.680 for people in these scenarios

560 00:28:16.680 --> 00:28:18.710 because food costs money and people

561 00:28:18.710 --> 00:28:20.950 do not always have the flexibility in their budgets

562 00:28:20.950 --> 00:28:22.913 to replace that spoiled food.

563 00:28:24.830 --> 00:28:27.210 So now I'll hand it off to my colleague, Sarah,

564 00:28:27.210 --> 00:28:30.183 to address building maintenance concerns.

565 00:28:32.158 --> 00:28:32.991 <v ->Thanks Kim.</v>

566 00:28:32.991 --> 00:28:36.570 So, we asked participants in the focus groups

567 00:28:36.570 --> 00:28:37.840 about the condition of there homes

568 00:28:37.840 --> 00:28:41.453 and we heard a lot of horror stories.

569 00:28:41.453 --> 00:28:43.870 (indistinct)

570 00:29:16.270 --> 00:29:18.000 <v ->Hi, seems that we're experiencing</v>

571 00:29:18.000 --> 00:29:20.993 some technical difficulties or is it just me?

572 00:29:23.731 --> 00:29:24.640 <v ->Can you, we might be.</v>

573 00:29:24.640 --> 00:29:27.050 So I'll just jump in for Sarah here.

574 00:29:27.050 --> 00:29:30.870 So, she started to mention that we heard some horror stories

575 00:29:30.870 --> 00:29:32.660 about building maintenance concerns.
 576 00:29:32.660 --> 00:29:35.327 So for example, one participant shared,
 577 00:29:35.327 --> 00:29:37.070 "My landlord told me when the ceiling
 578 00:29:37.070 --> 00:29:39.220 was falling down on me to move out,
 579 00:29:39.220 --> 00:29:40.350 he wasn't fixing it.
 580 00:29:40.350 --> 00:29:43.190 I've been told to move out or shut up, basi-
 cally.
 581 00:29:43.190 --> 00:29:45.960 They don't do anything about the problem."
 582 00:29:45.960 --> 00:29:48.180 The majority of participants are renters,
 583 00:29:48.180 --> 00:29:50.110 so they have to go through their landlords
 584 00:29:50.110 --> 00:29:51.850 for any maintenance issues.
 585 00:29:51.850 --> 00:29:53.840 We heard some stories of living conditions,
 586 00:29:53.840 --> 00:29:55.750 being uncomfortably cold,
 587 00:29:55.750 --> 00:29:57.750 unable to get adequate heat in the winter
 588 00:29:57.750 --> 00:30:01.030 due to lack of insulation and air ceiling
 589 00:30:01.030 --> 00:30:05.346 or too hot because of the cost
 590 00:30:05.346 --> 00:30:08.180 of air conditioning being so high.
 591 00:30:08.180 --> 00:30:10.257 The quote here at the top describes.
 592 00:30:10.257 --> 00:30:13.000 "The utilities were definitely more expensive...
 593 00:30:13.000 --> 00:30:15.370 and I used them way less than the other places
 594 00:30:15.370 --> 00:30:18.130 because it was just so drafty.
 595 00:30:18.130 --> 00:30:20.380 It was like there was almost no point
 596 00:30:20.380 --> 00:30:23.387 in putting the heat on because it didn't stay."
 597 00:30:26.270 --> 00:30:28.720 We heard about carbon monoxide leaks, mold,
 598 00:30:28.720 --> 00:30:30.750 water leaks and generally that landlords
 599 00:30:30.750 --> 00:30:34.020 respond very slowly if at all to these concerns.
 600 00:30:34.020 --> 00:30:35.380 Homeowners on the other hand,
 601 00:30:35.380 --> 00:30:38.270 which were only a handful, were concerned
 about
 602 00:30:38.270 --> 00:30:40.850 not having enough money to pay for upgrades.
 603 00:30:40.850 --> 00:30:43.330 So if a furnace goes out or something breaks,

604 00:30:43.330 --> 00:30:44.740 the homeowners who participated
 605 00:30:44.740 --> 00:30:47.260 are not able to afford those upgrades.
 606 00:30:47.260 --> 00:30:49.690 One even discussed selling their home
 607 00:30:49.690 --> 00:30:51.523 due to the financial stress.
 608 00:30:53.810 --> 00:30:55.160 <v ->Hi, can you guys hear me?</v>
 609 00:30:56.690 --> 00:30:57.670 <v ->Yes, you're back.</v>
 610 00:30:57.670 --> 00:30:58.690 <v ->Okay, I'm back.</v>
 611 00:30:58.690 --> 00:30:59.733 Sorry about that.
 612 00:31:01.010 --> 00:31:01.870 I'll try this again.
 613 00:31:01.870 --> 00:31:03.320 You can go to the next slide.
 614 00:31:05.120 --> 00:31:10.120 So, the last theme to talk about is access to
 assistance.
 615 00:31:10.570 --> 00:31:12.610 So, we don't have time to go over
 616 00:31:12.610 --> 00:31:14.490 all the various assistance programs
 617 00:31:14.490 --> 00:31:16.060 because I wanna focus on
 618 00:31:16.060 --> 00:31:18.960 the participant experience with assistance.
 619 00:31:18.960 --> 00:31:20.560 Generally, participants found
 620 00:31:20.560 --> 00:31:23.500 the application processes to be difficult.
 621 00:31:23.500 --> 00:31:25.500 So whether we're talking about bill assistance,
 622 00:31:25.500 --> 00:31:28.800 medical protection, winter protection or some-
 thing else,
 623 00:31:28.800 --> 00:31:31.990 participants have a really hard time applying
 for help.
 624 00:31:31.990 --> 00:31:34.900 There aren't enough locations to apply.
 625 00:31:34.900 --> 00:31:37.470 Applications are long and complicated.
 626 00:31:37.470 --> 00:31:39.870 They don't hear back for extended periods of
 time
 627 00:31:39.870 --> 00:31:41.750 after their applications are sent in
 628 00:31:41.750 --> 00:31:43.790 and they have to spend a significant amount
 629 00:31:43.790 --> 00:31:46.450 of time and money applying.
 630 00:31:46.450 --> 00:31:48.920 In addition, the outreach is not great.

631 00:31:48.920 --> 00:31:51.930 Most people hear about these programs through word of mouth,

632 00:31:51.930 --> 00:31:54.480 rather than through good marketing.

633 00:31:54.480 --> 00:31:57.590 Once participants do access a form of assistance,

634 00:31:57.590 --> 00:32:01.240 at times the payments are still not affordable.

635 00:32:01.240 --> 00:32:04.350 For energy efficiency through home energy solutions,

636 00:32:04.350 --> 00:32:08.390 if the fee team finds a carbon monoxide leak or mold,

637 00:32:08.390 --> 00:32:09.410 they will stop work,

638 00:32:09.410 --> 00:32:11.983 which prevents participants from getting upgrades.

639 00:32:13.350 --> 00:32:15.000 And you can go to the next slide.

640 00:32:17.440 --> 00:32:19.770 So, lastly participants talked a lot about

641 00:32:19.770 --> 00:32:22.900 how customer or client service is not great.

642 00:32:22.900 --> 00:32:26.760 So, whether it's the utility or community action agency,

643 00:32:26.760 --> 00:32:28.190 participants have talked to staff

644 00:32:28.190 --> 00:32:30.580 who are not necessarily well trained

645 00:32:30.580 --> 00:32:33.170 on the assistance programs available.

646 00:32:33.170 --> 00:32:35.460 So customer service at the utility

647 00:32:35.460 --> 00:32:37.700 sometimes fails to record the conversation.

648 00:32:37.700 --> 00:32:39.560 So every time the participant calls,

649 00:32:39.560 --> 00:32:41.380 they have to start over.

650 00:32:41.380 --> 00:32:43.450 In addition, there's lack of representation

651 00:32:43.450 --> 00:32:46.020 in utilities and community action agencies.

652 00:32:46.020 --> 00:32:47.640 So, participants discussed

653 00:32:47.640 --> 00:32:49.780 how the representatives they talked to

654 00:32:49.780 --> 00:32:51.550 rarely look like them or have been through

655 00:32:51.550 --> 00:32:53.300 what they're going through.

656 00:32:53.300 --> 00:32:56.300 On a related note, when applying for assistance,

657 00:32:56.300 --> 00:32:59.020 participants find the questioning to be invasive.

658 00:32:59.020 --> 00:33:00.530 So one participant was asked about

659 00:33:00.530 --> 00:33:02.500 the income of their neighbors and roommates

660 00:33:02.500 --> 00:33:04.970 in order to access weatherization.

661 00:33:04.970 --> 00:33:06.540 Another participant was asked about

662 00:33:06.540 --> 00:33:09.180 the income and criminal history of an ex-partner,

663 00:33:09.180 --> 00:33:11.750 who she no longer even had contact with.

664 00:33:11.750 --> 00:33:13.390 So neither of these participants

665 00:33:13.390 --> 00:33:16.580 continued with the process of getting assistance.

666 00:33:16.580 --> 00:33:19.050 Generally, we had participants

667 00:33:19.050 --> 00:33:21.580 who didn't feel respected when they asked for assistance.

668 00:33:21.580 --> 00:33:23.280 Some had negative experiences

669 00:33:23.280 --> 00:33:25.510 say 15, 20 years ago,

670 00:33:25.510 --> 00:33:27.780 and they haven't come back since.

671 00:33:27.780 --> 00:33:29.790 And others had really recent experiences

672 00:33:29.790 --> 00:33:31.650 with intrusive questioning.

673 00:33:31.650 --> 00:33:34.070 I'll point out the powerful quote to the right here

674 00:33:34.070 --> 00:33:35.393 and invite you to read it.

675 00:33:36.520 --> 00:33:38.860 This goes to show that negative experiences

676 00:33:38.860 --> 00:33:41.110 can stick in someone's memory for many years.

677 00:33:42.060 --> 00:33:44.850 And then, the last point here, when asked about

678 00:33:44.850 --> 00:33:46.860 energy efficiency or renewable energy,

679 00:33:46.860 --> 00:33:48.570 participants didn't find these solutions

680 00:33:48.570 --> 00:33:50.400 to be accessible to them.

681 00:33:50.400 --> 00:33:52.000 Being mostly renters, they have trouble

682 00:33:52.000 --> 00:33:55.010 with their landlords investing in these technologies.

683 00:33:55.010 --> 00:33:57.510 When trying to participate in a program,
 684 00:33:57.510 --> 00:34:00.380 participants explained how mold or carbon
 monoxide
 685 00:34:00.380 --> 00:34:02.210 or complicated applications
 686 00:34:02.210 --> 00:34:04.443 halt any effort for energy efficiency.
 687 00:34:06.550 --> 00:34:09.920 Homeowners feel that they can't afford energy
 efficiency
 688 00:34:09.920 --> 00:34:11.860 or renewable energy retrofits.
 689 00:34:11.860 --> 00:34:14.180 So now I'll turn it back over to Epongue
 690 00:34:14.180 --> 00:34:16.363 to discuss participant suggestions.
 691 00:34:18.700 --> 00:34:22.490 <v ->Yes so, another very important as-
 pect</v>
 692 00:34:22.490 --> 00:34:25.160 of our focus groups is asking participants
 693 00:34:25.160 --> 00:34:29.400 for their own policy recommendations or sug-
 gestions
 694 00:34:29.400 --> 00:34:33.893 for how to make their lives easier regarding
 energy burden.
 695 00:34:34.840 --> 00:34:36.470 One practical solution was that
 696 00:34:36.470 --> 00:34:38.300 landlords should be required to install
 697 00:34:38.300 --> 00:34:39.910 heat pumps and efficient appliances
 698 00:34:39.910 --> 00:34:43.070 when technology needs to be replaced.
 699 00:34:43.070 --> 00:34:47.260 A lot of participants expressed interest
 700 00:34:47.260 --> 00:34:52.120 and moving towards more energy-efficient ap-
 pliances,
 701 00:34:52.120 --> 00:34:54.180 but because they're renters
 702 00:34:54.180 --> 00:34:56.840 didn't have the means to do that.
 703 00:34:56.840 --> 00:34:58.570 Another was that energy companies
 704 00:34:58.570 --> 00:35:00.100 should hire community members
 705 00:35:00.100 --> 00:35:03.510 that have the personality to communicate
 personalized advice
 706 00:35:03.510 --> 00:35:06.203 and solutions to people with empathy.
 707 00:35:08.500 --> 00:35:09.990 Another participant suggested that
 708 00:35:09.990 --> 00:35:13.530 utilities move the application opening date

709 00:35:13.530 --> 00:35:17.040 for winter protection up to allow for more time,

710 00:35:17.040 --> 00:35:20.030 as well as creating drop boxes and email addresses

711 00:35:20.030 --> 00:35:21.720 that are checked more regularly

712 00:35:21.720 --> 00:35:24.283 to better facilitate the application process.

713 00:35:25.230 --> 00:35:27.550 Another recommendation made by multiple participants,

714 00:35:27.550 --> 00:35:29.940 regarded marketing and outreach.

715 00:35:29.940 --> 00:35:32.320 They suggested that schools be a medium

716 00:35:33.700 --> 00:35:35.930 through which information can be shared,

717 00:35:35.930 --> 00:35:39.090 including about energy assistance programs.

718 00:35:39.090 --> 00:35:41.430 They said that their children were old enough

719 00:35:41.430 --> 00:35:45.150 to bring home flyers and information packets.

720 00:35:45.150 --> 00:35:47.040 Other financial-related recommendations

721 00:35:47.040 --> 00:35:50.000 were that the price of energy should be based on income

722 00:35:50.000 --> 00:35:53.080 and that the income threshold should be increased

723 00:35:53.080 --> 00:35:55.670 for income threshold for assistance should be increased

724 00:35:55.670 --> 00:35:57.810 along with the addition of a transition period

725 00:35:57.810 --> 00:35:59.530 for all assistance programs,

726 00:35:59.530 --> 00:36:02.270 including food stamps and others.

727 00:36:02.270 --> 00:36:04.870 Overall, the majority of recommendations

728 00:36:04.870 --> 00:36:07.450 were made based in community.

729 00:36:07.450 --> 00:36:09.790 Utilization of existing community networks

730 00:36:09.790 --> 00:36:11.890 might be key to spreading the word

731 00:36:11.890 --> 00:36:13.790 about energy assistance programs

732 00:36:13.790 --> 00:36:15.853 and other avenues of assistance.

733 00:36:16.970 --> 00:36:19.380 While having conversations with participants

734 00:36:19.380 --> 00:36:20.580 and hearing their stories,

735 00:36:20.580 --> 00:36:22.510 it became very apparent to us that

736 00:36:22.510 --> 00:36:24.740 the issues they were voicing were much more
737 00:36:24.740 --> 00:36:27.210 than just about energy insecurity.
738 00:36:27.210 --> 00:36:29.340 All of their hardships had crosscutting themes
739 00:36:29.340 --> 00:36:31.840 in health and equity or inequity.
740 00:36:31.840 --> 00:36:34.140 Outages and shutoffs can lead to health problems
741 00:36:34.140 --> 00:36:37.650 regarding safe food consumption or temperature management.
742 00:36:37.650 --> 00:36:40.280 Issues with landlords, partly stem from
743 00:36:40.280 --> 00:36:42.010 the helplessness they felt about
744 00:36:42.010 --> 00:36:44.330 needing a roof over their heads.
745 00:36:44.330 --> 00:36:46.280 Because of these themes, it can be argued that
746 00:36:46.280 --> 00:36:48.310 tackling energy insecurity is about
747 00:36:48.310 --> 00:36:50.080 much more than just energy
748 00:36:50.080 --> 00:36:52.890 and has everything to do with problems within the system,
749 00:36:52.890 --> 00:36:57.150 especially poverty and lack of equitable opportunity.
750 00:36:57.150 --> 00:36:58.640 Basic needs should come first.
751 00:36:58.640 --> 00:37:01.150 Part of which includes affordable energy.
752 00:37:01.150 --> 00:37:02.740 It was apparent that many participants
753 00:37:02.740 --> 00:37:05.980 weren't able to fulfill many of their basic needs
754 00:37:05.980 --> 00:37:07.820 due to high energy costs
755 00:37:07.820 --> 00:37:10.720 and felt like they were not supported by energy companies.
756 00:37:11.720 --> 00:37:13.530 However, during these focus groups,
757 00:37:13.530 --> 00:37:15.010 while hearing each other's stories,
758 00:37:15.010 --> 00:37:17.000 a lot of participants opted
759 00:37:17.000 --> 00:37:20.080 to share their contact information with each other
760 00:37:20.080 --> 00:37:23.643 in order to provide help and insight to whoever need it.

761 00:37:24.528 --> 00:37:27.210 And this was a glimpse into the community-based solutions

762 00:37:27.210 --> 00:37:31.623 that some participants recommended and might be adopted.

763 00:37:33.140 --> 00:37:36.460 So, that is the end of our presentation.

764 00:37:36.460 --> 00:37:38.570 Thank you to the team.

765 00:37:38.570 --> 00:37:41.450 Before someone asks, we are planning to send the slides

766 00:37:41.450 --> 00:37:44.050 in the draft report out to everyone who registered today.

767 00:37:44.050 --> 00:37:47.020 So please keep an eye out for that email.

768 00:37:47.020 --> 00:37:48.510 We are also linking a survey.

769 00:37:48.510 --> 00:37:49.860 So if you could please take a moment

770 00:37:49.860 --> 00:37:51.363 to let us know your thoughts.

771 00:37:52.510 --> 00:37:54.440 Here are our acknowledgements.

772 00:37:54.440 --> 00:37:56.600 We obviously thank Operation Fuel

773 00:37:58.290 --> 00:38:02.173 and the names listed there for all their guidance.

774 00:38:03.170 --> 00:38:07.250 Definitely big thank you to Dr. Bozzi for her guidance

775 00:38:07.250 --> 00:38:09.730 and help throughout the last few months.

776 00:38:09.730 --> 00:38:11.883 I mean, thank you to our whole team.

777 00:38:12.900 --> 00:38:15.190 Thank you to the SNF Fund

778 00:38:15.190 --> 00:38:17.690 for the Integration of Theory and Practice

779 00:38:17.690 --> 00:38:19.270 for funding for this project.

780 00:38:19.270 --> 00:38:24.270 And most of all, thank you for our participants

781 00:38:24.700 --> 00:38:26.153 for sharing their stories.

782 00:38:27.108 --> 00:38:30.010 So, we'll continue with questions

783 00:38:30.010 --> 00:38:31.870 and discussion if you'd like.

784 00:38:31.870 --> 00:38:33.810 So please put questions into the chat

785 00:38:33.810 --> 00:38:36.360 and we'll keep answering the questions

786 00:38:36.360 --> 00:38:38.900 that are already there.

787 00:38:38.900 --> 00:38:39.733 Thank you.

788 00:38:41.610 --> 00:38:45.470 <v ->And I received a message to show our team slides again.</v>

789 00:38:45.470 --> 00:38:49.173 So I'm gonna go back to our team really quickly.

790 00:38:56.180 --> 00:38:57.730 <v Brenda Watson>I don't have a question necessarily.</v>

791 00:38:57.730 --> 00:38:59.750 I just wanted to share.

792 00:38:59.750 --> 00:39:01.870 This is Brenda Watson again.

793 00:39:01.870 --> 00:39:04.730 How I am impressed with the work

794 00:39:04.730 --> 00:39:07.820 that you all have done this semester

795 00:39:07.820 --> 00:39:12.240 and you shed light on a part of the energy story

796 00:39:12.240 --> 00:39:14.460 that we often do not hear.

797 00:39:14.460 --> 00:39:16.920 And we certainly do not plan for

798 00:39:16.920 --> 00:39:21.280 in terms of high-level planning

799 00:39:21.280 --> 00:39:24.450 on the state and utility side.

800 00:39:24.450 --> 00:39:27.740 I'm hoping that folks take the information

801 00:39:27.740 --> 00:39:29.290 that they've learned today

802 00:39:29.290 --> 00:39:32.910 and consider making adjustments to their current programs.

803 00:39:32.910 --> 00:39:34.410 I'm also really quite touched

804 00:39:34.410 --> 00:39:37.530 that the participants have decided to keep in touch.

805 00:39:37.530 --> 00:39:40.930 Clearly, this was a process that bonded them.

806 00:39:40.930 --> 00:39:44.080 And I want to thank you all and thank our participants

807 00:39:44.080 --> 00:39:47.130 for being brave enough to share their stories

808 00:39:47.130 --> 00:39:50.030 and you all providing them with the safe space to do that.

809 00:40:11.880 --> 00:40:13.500 <v ->Okay.</v>

810 00:40:13.500 --> 00:40:14.870 Going back to some of the questions

811 00:40:14.870 --> 00:40:18.757 that were asked earlier,

812 00:40:18.757 --> 00:40:21.330 "Did you find that the people you spoke with

813 00:40:21.330 --> 00:40:23.070 were knowledgeable of all the programs
814 00:40:23.070 --> 00:40:25.690 that are out there or were they limited
815 00:40:25.690 --> 00:40:30.217 by access to programs or wifi computers, et
cetera?"

816 00:40:36.184 --> 00:40:39.267 One of the team wants to answer that?

817 00:40:46.600 --> 00:40:48.420 <v ->I'd be happy to start this answer</v>
818 00:40:48.420 --> 00:40:51.993 and I'm sure someone on the team will have
something to add.

819 00:40:53.460 --> 00:40:57.530 In the focus groups that I attended and mod-
erated,

820 00:40:57.530 --> 00:40:59.180 there was always one to two people
821 00:40:59.180 --> 00:41:02.680 who had kind of an extensive knowledge
822 00:41:02.680 --> 00:41:04.480 of available assistance programs
823 00:41:04.480 --> 00:41:05.930 and kind of how it worked was
824 00:41:05.930 --> 00:41:08.870 as the rest of the group were sharing their
stories

825 00:41:08.870 --> 00:41:10.250 and their experiences kind of
826 00:41:10.250 --> 00:41:12.470 with paying for energy costs.

827 00:41:12.470 --> 00:41:14.610 It was those one to two people who would
kind of step in

828 00:41:14.610 --> 00:41:16.410 and be like, hey, have you heard of this pro-
gram?

829 00:41:16.410 --> 00:41:17.820 Have you heard of this program?

830 00:41:17.820 --> 00:41:19.020 You should look this up.

831 00:41:20.200 --> 00:41:23.030 And so, that was kind of my experience.

832 00:41:23.030 --> 00:41:25.600 And I thought that was really cool.

833 00:41:25.600 --> 00:41:28.030 I think on average, there was not
834 00:41:28.030 --> 00:41:31.100 a great amount of knowledge about existing
programs.

835 00:41:31.100 --> 00:41:33.623 But those few people in every focus group,
836 00:41:35.740 --> 00:41:39.613 kind of left everyone being more informed by
the end of it.

837 00:41:58.430 --> 00:42:03.397 <v ->Great, another question was,</v>

838 00:42:03.397 --> 00:42:06.580 "Did anyone express that they tried to reach out

839 00:42:06.580 --> 00:42:08.260 to the utility company for help

840 00:42:08.260 --> 00:42:10.717 such as payment plans or extensions?"

841 00:42:13.090 --> 00:42:14.543 <v ->I can speak to that one.</v>

842 00:42:16.540 --> 00:42:18.920 Yeah, I mean, people talked a lot about

843 00:42:18.920 --> 00:42:21.610 how they would try to reach out to the utility.

844 00:42:21.610 --> 00:42:23.840 A couple people had positive experiences,

845 00:42:23.840 --> 00:42:25.640 but overwhelmingly the experiences

846 00:42:25.640 --> 00:42:28.393 with the utility customer service were quite negative.

847 00:42:29.950 --> 00:42:32.120 The feeling was that they had to start over

848 00:42:32.120 --> 00:42:33.130 every time they called

849 00:42:33.130 --> 00:42:35.090 and talked to a different representative.

850 00:42:35.090 --> 00:42:38.050 And sometimes the customer service agents

851 00:42:38.050 --> 00:42:41.203 weren't well trained on the assistance programs available.

852 00:42:52.930 --> 00:42:55.217 <v ->Great, another question,</v>

853 00:42:55.217 --> 00:42:57.990 "What types of information do applicants need

854 00:42:57.990 --> 00:43:00.830 to provide to heating assistance programs?

855 00:43:00.830 --> 00:43:03.247 Do utilities provide cooling assistance?"

856 00:43:08.710 --> 00:43:11.330 <v ->I can answer that in terms of Operation Fuel.</v>

857 00:43:11.330 --> 00:43:14.680 We require income statements

858 00:43:14.680 --> 00:43:17.730 and copy of the utility bill.

859 00:43:17.730 --> 00:43:20.500 In terms of cooling assistance,

860 00:43:20.500 --> 00:43:24.840 so our program runs two seasons, summer, fall,

861 00:43:24.840 --> 00:43:29.600 which start in July and end in October or November,

862 00:43:29.600 --> 00:43:31.393 depending on the conditions.

863 00:43:33.080 --> 00:43:35.850 And then we start over again in

864 00:43:38.550 --> 00:43:41.730 December through the end of May.
 865 00:43:41.730 --> 00:43:44.630 We do sometimes try to extend
 866 00:43:44.630 --> 00:43:47.770 our program season if we can.
 867 00:43:47.770 --> 00:43:49.720 Again, based on the conditions,
 868 00:43:49.720 --> 00:43:53.130 which include our funding resources,
 869 00:43:53.130 --> 00:43:56.800 outside temperature and frequency of appli-
 cations.
 870 00:43:56.800 --> 00:43:59.560 If we don't see a slowdown,
 871 00:43:59.560 --> 00:44:03.220 then we do our best to stay open a lot longer.
 872 00:44:03.220 --> 00:44:05.720 So our program offers assistance
 873 00:44:05.720 --> 00:44:08.150 with all home energy sources,
 874 00:44:08.150 --> 00:44:10.950 which include electric and gas utilities
 875 00:44:12.212 --> 00:44:15.300 and all fuel sources as well as water utility
 assistance.
 876 00:44:15.300 --> 00:44:20.040 So the electric assistance is part of that cooling
 support,
 877 00:44:20.040 --> 00:44:25.040 but I don't know the schedule
 878 00:44:25.040 --> 00:44:27.940 or all of the guidelines regarding
 879 00:44:27.940 --> 00:44:29.540 the state's energy assistance program.
 880 00:44:29.540 --> 00:44:32.504 I wouldn't wanna answer on that on their
 behalf
 881 00:44:32.504 --> 00:44:34.863 and get any information wrong.
 882 00:44:38.810 --> 00:44:40.877 <v ->Great, another question.</v>
 883 00:44:40.877 --> 00:44:43.930 "Do we have a sense of how much waste
 884 00:44:43.930 --> 00:44:47.230 in medications, food, et cetera occurred with
 this group
 885 00:44:47.230 --> 00:44:52.170 and the corresponding estimate of money lost?
 886 00:44:52.170 --> 00:44:53.850 Did they express any indication of
 887 00:44:53.850 --> 00:44:56.270 how significant the loss of medications,
 888 00:44:56.270 --> 00:44:57.580 especially insulin was
 889 00:44:59.610 --> 00:45:02.700 or such as did they stop taking insulin
 890 00:45:02.700 --> 00:45:05.317 because it was not available or was wasted?"

891 00:45:16.340 --> 00:45:18.003 <v ->That is a great question.</v>

892 00:45:18.970 --> 00:45:20.480 I'll take a first stab at it.

893 00:45:20.480 --> 00:45:23.630 So, the focus groups that I participated in

894 00:45:23.630 --> 00:45:27.490 did not have experience with anxieties

895 00:45:27.490 --> 00:45:31.410 around losing medicine,

896 00:45:31.410 --> 00:45:35.150 but they did have a lot of anxiety around losing their food,

897 00:45:35.150 --> 00:45:36.870 especially with COVID,

898 00:45:36.870 --> 00:45:39.340 especially in the beginning period of COVID,

899 00:45:39.340 --> 00:45:41.970 where people were really stocking up on food

900 00:45:41.970 --> 00:45:44.010 and really filling their fridge

901 00:45:44.010 --> 00:45:45.380 with as much food as they could.

902 00:45:45.380 --> 00:45:48.600 So they could minimize their trips to the grocery store

903 00:45:48.600 --> 00:45:52.810 to hopefully support their own health.

904 00:45:52.810 --> 00:45:55.140 But because of that, they were really worried

905 00:45:55.140 --> 00:45:57.920 about potential power outages in the summer.

906 00:45:57.920 --> 00:46:01.110 And that they had just stocked their fridge

907 00:46:01.110 --> 00:46:02.960 full of foods that they could minimize

908 00:46:02.960 --> 00:46:04.090 going to the grocery store,

909 00:46:04.090 --> 00:46:05.990 but what if their power went out

910 00:46:05.990 --> 00:46:09.240 and they lost all of that food that was in their fridge.

911 00:46:09.240 --> 00:46:12.890 And that would've been a significant

912 00:46:12.890 --> 00:46:14.640 negative financial impact for them

913 00:46:14.640 --> 00:46:18.410 because they had really spent a lot of money on that food

914 00:46:18.410 --> 00:46:21.490 and were counting on having that food to eat.

915 00:46:21.490 --> 00:46:24.160 And so that would've been, I assume,

916 00:46:24.160 --> 00:46:26.920 hundreds of dollars that they would've lost.

917 00:46:26.920 --> 00:46:31.550 And so, that was definitely a significant concern.

918 00:46:31.550 --> 00:46:33.230 I didn't hear anything about insulin,
 919 00:46:33.230 --> 00:46:34.760 but I don't know if any of my teammates
 920 00:46:34.760 --> 00:46:35.943 have anything to add.
 921 00:46:53.540 --> 00:46:55.320 <v ->I will quickly just add one thing.</v>
 922 00:46:55.320 --> 00:46:57.290 This is not related to medication or insulin.
 923 00:46:57.290 --> 00:46:59.460 It's more so related to food.
 924 00:46:59.460 --> 00:47:02.020 In my focus groups, it was something I re-
 member
 925 00:47:02.020 --> 00:47:04.490 one of my participants talking about was
 926 00:47:04.490 --> 00:47:06.550 not attaching a specific dollar amount
 927 00:47:06.550 --> 00:47:08.830 to how much was lost during something
 928 00:47:08.830 --> 00:47:10.780 like a shutoff or a power outage,
 929 00:47:10.780 --> 00:47:13.384 but more so that they have
 930 00:47:13.384 --> 00:47:16.240 like a set budget of how much they spend,
 931 00:47:16.240 --> 00:47:17.870 like per week or per month on things
 932 00:47:17.870 --> 00:47:20.290 like groceries, food, et cetera.
 933 00:47:20.290 --> 00:47:21.900 And when something like this happens,
 934 00:47:21.900 --> 00:47:23.890 when their electricity goes off
 935 00:47:23.890 --> 00:47:25.710 and the refrigerator stops working,
 936 00:47:25.710 --> 00:47:28.720 that week's budget of food is gone.
 937 00:47:28.720 --> 00:47:31.820 And it's like, you can't come up with,
 938 00:47:31.820 --> 00:47:33.760 you have to dig into the next week's budget,
 939 00:47:33.760 --> 00:47:36.390 which is a huge and significant loss.
 940 00:47:36.390 --> 00:47:38.600 So that's kind of what some of
 941 00:47:38.600 --> 00:47:40.700 the answers in my focus groups were about.
 942 00:47:43.340 --> 00:47:46.020 <v ->Yeah, and I guess speaking to the med-
 ical side,</v>
 943 00:47:46.020 --> 00:47:48.540 I don't think any of our participants
 944 00:47:49.640 --> 00:47:51.780 mentioned insulin in particular,
 945 00:47:51.780 --> 00:47:56.400 but I think at least one mentioned medical
 devices
 946 00:47:56.400 --> 00:47:58.200 that require electricity

947 00:47:59.200 --> 00:48:04.200 that participants or their neighbors need to,
948 00:48:04.260 --> 00:48:05.610 I mean, basically stay alive.
949 00:48:05.610 --> 00:48:09.280 And so, there was a lot of concern around
that,
950 00:48:09.280 --> 00:48:14.280 but I guess that was mostly geared towards
951 00:48:16.760 --> 00:48:19.973 storm outages rather than shutoffs.
952 00:48:26.350 --> 00:48:28.227 Okay, another question.
953 00:48:28.227 --> 00:48:30.750 "Did participants have recommendations
954 00:48:30.750 --> 00:48:34.500 on what a better process or method might be
955 00:48:34.500 --> 00:48:37.130 for sharing sensitive or uncomfortable infor-
mation
956 00:48:37.130 --> 00:48:40.493 that is required by utilities for program eligi-
bility.
957 00:48:42.330 --> 00:48:44.600 With the example of the respondent
958 00:48:45.650 --> 00:48:48.080 that was uncomfortable with
959 00:48:48.080 --> 00:48:51.380 the income documentation of roommates?
960 00:48:51.380 --> 00:48:54.580 So how can motivated renters, landlords
961 00:48:54.580 --> 00:48:56.880 or third party support or outreach services
962 00:48:56.880 --> 00:48:58.467 handle this situation?"
963 00:49:03.380 --> 00:49:06.680 So as far as I remember,
964 00:49:06.680 --> 00:49:09.700 there were no particular recommendations
965 00:49:09.700 --> 00:49:12.400 on what a better process might be,
966 00:49:12.400 --> 00:49:17.400 other than reducing intrusive questioning
wherever possible.
967 00:49:18.720 --> 00:49:20.060 One participant said that
968 00:49:20.060 --> 00:49:22.080 when dealing with public money organizations
969 00:49:22.080 --> 00:49:24.840 should have to adhere to certain guidelines
970 00:49:24.840 --> 00:49:28.280 and provide specific information
971 00:49:28.280 --> 00:49:30.160 to disperses public dollars.
972 00:49:30.160 --> 00:49:33.070 And participants generally understand
973 00:49:33.070 --> 00:49:35.270 that they have to provide financial informa-
tion,

974 00:49:35.270 --> 00:49:38.540 but maintaining respect for the people
 975 00:49:38.540 --> 00:49:40.363 who need assistance is key.
 976 00:49:43.041 --> 00:49:47.330 So yeah, if anyone wants to tackle
 977 00:49:47.330 --> 00:49:52.330 the second part where renters and landlords
 978 00:49:53.330 --> 00:49:55.237 can handle this situation.
 979 00:49:56.100 --> 00:49:57.940 <v ->I'll just jump in quickly to add</v>
 980 00:49:57.940 --> 00:49:59.000 to what you were saying as well.
 981 00:49:59.000 --> 00:50:01.950 And I think a lot of the participants' reactions
 982 00:50:01.950 --> 00:50:04.860 to invasive questioning was also centered
 around
 983 00:50:04.860 --> 00:50:09.380 lack of follow up after having such a personal
 experience.
 984 00:50:09.380 --> 00:50:10.790 Sharing that information too
 985 00:50:10.790 --> 00:50:15.430 and feeling like after providing such intimate
 details,
 986 00:50:15.430 --> 00:50:19.040 also feeling like their application
 987 00:50:19.040 --> 00:50:20.710 potentially fell through the cracks
 988 00:50:20.710 --> 00:50:25.390 and they had to add extra effort
 989 00:50:25.390 --> 00:50:29.620 in order to receive assistance.
 990 00:50:29.620 --> 00:50:32.150 And so I think that added to the discomfort
 991 00:50:32.150 --> 00:50:36.033 with feeling like the questioning was invasive.
 992 00:50:39.520 --> 00:50:40.821 <v ->And I'd like to add that.</v>
 993 00:50:40.821 --> 00:50:43.780 I think that one of the answers to
 994 00:50:45.010 --> 00:50:49.190 a better process of enrollment is data-sharing
 agreements
 995 00:50:49.190 --> 00:50:51.310 between the utility companies
 996 00:50:51.310 --> 00:50:54.960 and community-based organizations.
 997 00:50:54.960 --> 00:50:59.500 Like what I would like to do is not even have
 people apply.
 998 00:50:59.500 --> 00:51:02.190 If that person is on a fixed income
 999 00:51:03.310 --> 00:51:05.883 over a certain age,
 1000 00:51:07.170 --> 00:51:10.700 we would just get a list of the most vulnerable

1001 00:51:10.700 --> 00:51:12.860 from the utility companies.

1002 00:51:12.860 --> 00:51:16.470 Those with balances on their accounts,

1003 00:51:16.470 --> 00:51:20.800 and that we would just then send the utility companies

1004 00:51:20.800 --> 00:51:24.020 a check on behalf of those customers

1005 00:51:24.020 --> 00:51:27.130 and that we would just do this annually

1006 00:51:27.130 --> 00:51:30.990 so that anyone who struggles

1007 00:51:30.990 --> 00:51:33.570 with this year after year after year,

1008 00:51:33.570 --> 00:51:37.023 again, on a fixed income where their income will not change,

1009 00:51:38.220 --> 00:51:42.650 that we just automatically provide

1010 00:51:42.650 --> 00:51:44.900 a payment on those customers' behalf.

1011 00:51:44.900 --> 00:51:47.070 And then we can kind of think about ways

1012 00:51:47.070 --> 00:51:50.350 to support folks who are in that second tier,

1013 00:51:50.350 --> 00:51:52.920 who may be employed,

1014 00:51:52.920 --> 00:51:57.730 but still are on incomes that do not line up

1015 00:51:57.730 --> 00:52:00.030 with the cost of living in the state.

1016 00:52:00.030 --> 00:52:02.010 There's gotta be a way in which we can kind of

1017 00:52:02.010 --> 00:52:04.210 auto-enroll those folks too,

1018 00:52:04.210 --> 00:52:06.550 but it really does boil down to

1019 00:52:06.550 --> 00:52:08.430 having these data-sharing agreements

1020 00:52:08.430 --> 00:52:12.433 between utility companies and community organizations.

1021 00:52:20.000 --> 00:52:22.547 <v ->Great, another question.</v>

1022 00:52:22.547 --> 00:52:25.020 "Was it ever brought up how tenants

1023 00:52:25.020 --> 00:52:28.790 don't have access to control the energy they pay for,

1024 00:52:28.790 --> 00:52:33.027 because landlord's lock basements where fuse boxes may be?"

1025 00:52:42.880 --> 00:52:44.320 <v ->Sorry, I don't mean to keep talking,</v>

1026 00:52:44.320 --> 00:52:47.910 but I do have an answer for this one that I'll be quick.

1027 00:52:47.910 --> 00:52:49.540 So in one of my focus groups,

1028 00:52:49.540 --> 00:52:51.180 there was one person in particular

1029 00:52:51.180 --> 00:52:54.510 who was talking about how she lives in a rental unit.

1030 00:52:54.510 --> 00:52:58.900 And she pays for all of her utilities.

1031 00:52:58.900 --> 00:53:00.940 None of her utilities are included in the rent,

1032 00:53:00.940 --> 00:53:04.290 but her landlord doesn't let her

1033 00:53:04.290 --> 00:53:07.130 like change anything about like

1034 00:53:07.130 --> 00:53:08.930 the temperature control of the unit,

1035 00:53:08.930 --> 00:53:10.930 access to changing the heat settings

1036 00:53:10.930 --> 00:53:12.140 are not available to her.

1037 00:53:12.140 --> 00:53:13.120 It's locked away.

1038 00:53:13.120 --> 00:53:14.690 I don't know if that was in the basement or not,

1039 00:53:14.690 --> 00:53:17.350 but this was definitely brought up.

1040 00:53:17.350 --> 00:53:20.900 And I mean, quite frankly,

1041 00:53:20.900 --> 00:53:23.780 like it's terrible, it's disgusting.

1042 00:53:23.780 --> 00:53:25.763 And so it definitely came up.

1043 00:53:31.200 --> 00:53:33.210 <v ->And at Operation Fuel, we often hear</v>

1044 00:53:33.210 --> 00:53:35.680 from our fuel banks and even some customers

1045 00:53:35.680 --> 00:53:39.450 who are applying independently through our portal,

1046 00:53:39.450 --> 00:53:42.040 that there is a complicated relationship

1047 00:53:42.040 --> 00:53:46.460 between their landlord and their utility bill.

1048 00:53:46.460 --> 00:53:50.390 And that the landlord has the bill in their name.

1049 00:53:50.390 --> 00:53:53.820 So we do work around those issues so that

1050 00:53:53.820 --> 00:53:55.570 we can continue to provide the support

1051 00:53:55.570 --> 00:53:59.710 and not deny a person assistance

1052 00:53:59.710 --> 00:54:02.120 when those situations arise.

1053 00:54:02.120 --> 00:54:04.270 But I think that that's another piece that
1054 00:54:04.270 --> 00:54:06.320 we all need to think about is
1055 00:54:06.320 --> 00:54:08.750 not everyone's situation is so cut and dry
1056 00:54:08.750 --> 00:54:10.670 that they can just come into your office
1057 00:54:10.670 --> 00:54:13.950 and provide you with all the documents that
you require
1058 00:54:13.950 --> 00:54:15.570 and then get the assistance.
1059 00:54:15.570 --> 00:54:18.750 And in some cases they're not even guaran-
teed assistance
1060 00:54:18.750 --> 00:54:20.800 if they have all of their paperwork in order.
1061 00:54:20.800 --> 00:54:22.720 So, there's gotta be a better way
1062 00:54:22.720 --> 00:54:24.890 in which we remove these barriers.
1063 00:54:24.890 --> 00:54:27.600 Again, auto-enrolling people that we know
1064 00:54:27.600 --> 00:54:29.460 are struggling with this.
1065 00:54:29.460 --> 00:54:33.943 Perhaps we can use census data block infor-
mation to do that.
1066 00:54:34.880 --> 00:54:37.430 I think that as we, for me,
1067 00:54:37.430 --> 00:54:40.870 I feel like we're nearly into 2023.
1068 00:54:40.870 --> 00:54:43.950 So that's just how rapidly things are moving.
1069 00:54:43.950 --> 00:54:45.690 It just seems really outdated
1070 00:54:45.690 --> 00:54:48.170 that we are still requiring people
1071 00:54:48.170 --> 00:54:50.910 to make an appointment to apply for assis-
tance.
1072 00:54:50.910 --> 00:54:52.700 I just don't understand why we're still
1073 00:54:52.700 --> 00:54:57.700 in that system of us assisting people.
1074 00:54:57.740 --> 00:55:00.593 There's gotta be a more efficient way to do
this.
1075 00:55:05.450 --> 00:55:06.510 <v ->Thank you, Brenda.</v>
1076 00:55:06.510 --> 00:55:08.080 And I will add one more thing.
1077 00:55:08.080 --> 00:55:11.600 My sense is that housing feels like
1078 00:55:11.600 --> 00:55:13.380 the most important need.
1079 00:55:13.380 --> 00:55:16.040 And so then if there's this tension

1080 00:55:16.040 --> 00:55:19.060 between the renter and a landlord,
1081 00:55:19.060 --> 00:55:21.220 I think the renters often feel like
1082 00:55:21.220 --> 00:55:23.000 they don't wanna report the landlord
1083 00:55:23.000 --> 00:55:26.570 or create tension between
1084 00:55:26.570 --> 00:55:28.430 them around the heating
1085 00:55:28.430 --> 00:55:32.120 because they want to make sure that they
keep their housing.
1086 00:55:32.120 --> 00:55:33.810 And so, I think that really points
1087 00:55:33.810 --> 00:55:37.550 to the importance of ensuring basic needs
1088 00:55:37.550 --> 00:55:40.000 of providing affordable housing that is
1089 00:55:41.190 --> 00:55:45.540 quality housing and that the energy assis-
tance
1090 00:55:45.540 --> 00:55:46.970 can be a part of that.
1091 00:55:46.970 --> 00:55:50.993 But these essential needs are really important
first.
1092 00:56:02.520 --> 00:56:03.353 <v ->Great.</v>
1093 00:56:07.967 --> 00:56:10.910 "Do the utilities know who is struggling
1094 00:56:11.930 --> 00:56:14.597 and why can't they give that info?"
1095 00:56:16.659 --> 00:56:19.040 <v ->The utility companies do have a
list</v>
1096 00:56:19.040 --> 00:56:21.120 of their hardship customers.
1097 00:56:21.120 --> 00:56:25.360 And they will not share that info
1098 00:56:25.360 --> 00:56:29.340 because they do not have data-sharing agree-
ments with,
1099 00:56:29.340 --> 00:56:30.970 well, I'll just speak for Operation Fuel.
1100 00:56:30.970 --> 00:56:32.320 They do not have one with us.
1101 00:56:32.320 --> 00:56:37.320 We are actively working with them on,
1102 00:56:37.327 --> 00:56:41.680 hopefully having something sorted out with
them soon,
1103 00:56:41.680 --> 00:56:43.910 hopefully by July.
1104 00:56:43.910 --> 00:56:48.160 I believe that, we have a pretty solid reputa-
tion
1105 00:56:48.160 --> 00:56:49.703 as an organization in that.

1106 00:56:50.930 --> 00:56:54.730 I believe that we can be trusted with that customer info.

1107 00:56:54.730 --> 00:56:59.250 And again, it would save us a lot of admin time

1108 00:56:59.250 --> 00:57:03.420 if they just sent us a list of those customers

1109 00:57:03.420 --> 00:57:06.120 and we just mailed them back that check.

1110 00:57:06.120 --> 00:57:08.540 And then they can just code those customers

1111 00:57:08.540 --> 00:57:13.510 protected for that month or someone noted earlier

1112 00:57:13.510 --> 00:57:16.610 or recommended earlier in your group, in your focus group,

1113 00:57:16.610 --> 00:57:19.913 that the winter protection programs start sooner,

1114 00:57:21.180 --> 00:57:23.160 which is a solution.

1115 00:57:23.160 --> 00:57:26.390 But there's also, I think,

1116 00:57:26.390 --> 00:57:28.530 a new situation that we're running into now

1117 00:57:28.530 --> 00:57:31.700 that is unfamiliar to Connecticut

1118 00:57:31.700 --> 00:57:33.660 and that's summer protection.

1119 00:57:33.660 --> 00:57:38.463 As we continue to see our temperatures rise in the summer,

1120 00:57:40.160 --> 00:57:43.140 heat waves are becoming more frequent.

1121 00:57:43.140 --> 00:57:47.563 I think the greater threat to a lack of electricity,

1122 00:57:49.660 --> 00:57:52.163 access to hot water is in the summer.

1123 00:57:53.170 --> 00:57:55.750 That is where people who have vulnerable issues

1124 00:57:55.750 --> 00:57:58.880 or underlying issues are at most threat

1125 00:57:58.880 --> 00:58:02.290 is in the summer compared to winter.

1126 00:58:02.290 --> 00:58:04.490 I know that there's this, we all grew up believing

1127 00:58:04.490 --> 00:58:06.540 that people freeze to death without heat.

1128 00:58:08.100 --> 00:58:12.700 I can't recall in my lifetime ever hearing about,

1129 00:58:12.700 --> 00:58:15.030 my lifetime at Operation Fuel that is,

1130 00:58:15.030 --> 00:58:17.820 ever hearing about anyone freezing to death.
 1131 00:58:17.820 --> 00:58:20.050 I believe that winter-related deaths
 1132 00:58:20.050 --> 00:58:23.193 are more connected to people slipping and
 falling,
 1133 00:58:24.320 --> 00:58:27.500 having heart attacks during snow removal
 1134 00:58:27.500 --> 00:58:28.590 and things like that.
 1135 00:58:28.590 --> 00:58:30.260 Car accidents.
 1136 00:58:30.260 --> 00:58:32.470 I can't recall any a time where people
 1137 00:58:32.470 --> 00:58:34.370 were freezing to death.
 1138 00:58:34.370 --> 00:58:38.500 So I think that we should consider
 1139 00:58:38.500 --> 00:58:42.180 a policy around a moratorium
 1140 00:58:42.180 --> 00:58:45.163 when a heat wave is approaching.
 1141 00:58:47.130 --> 00:58:49.730 And some states do have that, Phoenix in
 particular.
 1142 00:58:56.960 --> 00:58:58.907 <v ->There's another question for you,
 Brenda.</v>
 1143 00:58:58.907 --> 00:59:02.240 "Will the utility companies match any pay-
 ments received
 1144 00:59:02.240 --> 00:59:04.767 that is not from the energy program?"
 1145 00:59:06.890 --> 00:59:09.670 <v ->So yes, the utility companies</v>
 1146 00:59:09.670 --> 00:59:11.670 do have arrearage forgiveness programs
 1147 00:59:11.670 --> 00:59:13.810 that their customers can enroll in.
 1148 00:59:13.810 --> 00:59:15.930 Gannon, I'll put you on a spot,
 1149 00:59:15.930 --> 00:59:19.440 as I know that you can answer that question
 1150 00:59:19.440 --> 00:59:21.010 better than I can in terms of
 1151 00:59:22.490 --> 00:59:24.190 what protections are in place
 1152 00:59:24.190 --> 00:59:26.683 and what programs folks can enroll in.
 1153 00:59:29.660 --> 00:59:31.060 <v ->Yeah, and I think there's,</v>
 1154 00:59:32.281 --> 00:59:33.114 it's kinda a complicated question
 1155 00:59:33.114 --> 00:59:34.440 based on the time of the year,
 1156 00:59:34.440 --> 00:59:36.420 'cause we just came out of the winter protec-
 tion period

1157 00:59:36.420 --> 00:59:37.860 that ends on May 1st.

1158 00:59:37.860 --> 00:59:39.143 So we've been seeing,

1159 00:59:40.380 --> 00:59:41.700 I know our programs team has been seeing

1160 00:59:41.700 --> 00:59:43.630 an increase in applications from folks

1161 00:59:43.630 --> 00:59:45.190 because they've had protection.

1162 00:59:45.190 --> 00:59:47.160 But sometimes when you're protected from shutoff,

1163 00:59:47.160 --> 00:59:49.263 your bill is continuing to accrue.

1164 00:59:50.223 --> 00:59:53.540 So, during the protection period,

1165 00:59:53.540 --> 00:59:56.450 there's a matching payment program people can enroll in.

1166 00:59:56.450 --> 00:59:59.010 And then there's also a new,

1167 00:59:59.010 --> 01:00:01.890 there's a new start that Eversource has.

1168 01:00:01.890 --> 01:00:03.640 But I would encourage folks,

1169 01:00:03.640 --> 01:00:05.320 the people who can really explain this

1170 01:00:05.320 --> 01:00:07.230 are gonna be your utility company.

1171 01:00:07.230 --> 01:00:10.900 And I would encourage folks to contact their utilities

1172 01:00:10.900 --> 01:00:14.760 if they're looking for the best fit for them.

1173 01:00:14.760 --> 01:00:16.170 'Cause there are a few different payment plans

1174 01:00:16.170 --> 01:00:17.670 and they kinda change based on

1175 01:00:18.568 --> 01:00:20.583 what PURA approves in that year.

1176 01:00:23.850 --> 01:00:25.480 <v ->Great.</v>

1177 01:00:25.480 --> 01:00:28.840 I think that's all the time we have now.

1178 01:00:28.840 --> 01:00:31.890 We would like to thank CT network for broadcasting today

1179 01:00:31.890 --> 01:00:36.890 and the recording of this will be on their website.

1180 01:00:38.190 --> 01:00:40.460 And just a reminder to fill out this survey

1181 01:00:40.460 --> 01:00:42.870 that Sarah sent in the chat.

1182 01:00:42.870 --> 01:00:47.710 And thank you so much for joining us.

1183 01:00:47.710 --> 01:00:49.563 We really appreciate your time.