



News Release

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Home Energy Assistance Program Winter Crisis Continues through March 29 January 15, 2019

PAINESVILLE, Ohio— Lifeline, Inc. and Ohio Development Services Agency will continue to help eligible Ohioans stay warm during the cold winter months. The Home Energy Assistance Winter Crisis Program provides eligible Ohioans heating assistance if they are disconnected from their heating source, threatened with disconnection or if they have less than 25 percent supply of bulk fuel. The program began November 1, 2018 and runs until March 29, 2019.

“Working with Lifeline, we want to help Ohioans stay warm this winter,” said David Goodman, director of the Ohio Development Services Agency.

With the Lake Erie snow machine already in motion in northeast Ohio, many residents take for granted the fact that they can turn on their furnaces and heat their homes whenever they wish. Many more, however, will need help purchasing that heat.

The Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) Winter Crisis Program began distributing funds to help pay for heating on Nov. 1 and the application numbers have been steady according to agency officials.

“Our staff has completed applications for 423 Lake County households between November 1 and January 11,” said Carrie Dotson, Executive Director of Lifeline, Inc. “While it was warm for the earlier part of winter, the winter chill has set in and we know that the need for financial assistance with heating bills is going to climb as it gets colder.”

Of those 423 applications, 391 have been approved for assistance. Nearly \$120,000 has already been allocated to help those in need since the program began.

“We anticipate more people than ever needing help with heat,” said Dotson. “Our winters can be harsh, particularly in northeast Ohio, and this program helps people heat their homes safely without needing to choose between basic needs like heat, rent, medications and food.”

To qualify for the Winter Crisis Program, a household must be threatened with disconnection, have been disconnected or have less than a 25 percent supply of bulk fuel. The household must also have a gross income at or below 175 percent of the federal poverty level. For a family of four the annual income must be at or below \$43,925.

Individuals interested in receiving Winter Crisis assistance must have a face-to-face interview at Lifeline. Customers **must bring** the following items to their appointment:

- proof of income (copies of pay stubs), 2017 tax filings for self-employed
- copies of their most recent energy bills
- list of all household members with Social Security numbers and birth dates
- proof of U.S. citizenship/legal residency for all household members

Examples of documents that are accepted to prove citizenship/legal residency include: a Social Security Card, birth certificate, U.S. Passport, naturalization paper/certification of citizenship, permanent VISA, and INS ID Card. A list of all required documentation can be found on the downloadable flier on Lifeline's website or is available in the office.

Ohioans also have the option of enrolling in a longer-term plan, PIPP Plus, which allows them to pay a percentage of their income rather than high bills they cannot afford. Under PIPP Plus, customers pay 6 percent of their monthly income or \$10 a month, whichever is greater, to both electric and gas utilities. Customers in all-electric homes pay 10 percent or \$10, whichever is greater. This stays the same for 12 months and then income is rechecked. The key to this program is keeping up with on-time payments, said Marina Rivera, Energy Programs Manager at Lifeline.

"For each on-time and full monthly payment, PIPP Plus customers see a credit on their bills for their current balances and a credit toward their accumulated arrearage," Rivera said. "PIPP Plus helps customers eliminate old utility debt and avoid new utility debt."

To be eligible for PIPP Plus, customers must have a household income at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty line and be a customer of a regulated gas or electric company. Any adult household member reporting zero income may be asked to provide tax documentation as verification. The program is administered by the Ohio Development Services Agency and the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio.

The Lifeline Energy Office will offer both scheduled appointments and walk-in hours each week. Appointments can be scheduled by calling our automated appointment line at 1-866-223-1471. This line will also give you a list of the required documents needed to complete an application.

Walk-in sessions will begin each Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 7:30 a.m. All walk-in sessions are on a first come, first served basis. Only customers who meet the eligibility requirements and have *all* required documentation will be able to complete their application process that day. All others will be asked to return on another day or encouraged to schedule an appointment.

The office will be closed on Monday, January 21 in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

To learn more about these programs, contact Lifeline, Inc.'s Energy Assistance Office at (440) 350-9160. Lifeline's Energy Assistance Office is located at 54 S. State Street, Suite 303 in Painesville.

Ohioans can also call the toll-free hotline at (800) 282-0880, Monday through Friday (hearing impaired customers may dial 711 for assistance or visit http://development.ohio.gov/is/is_heapwinter.htm for more information about the Winter Crisis Program. For more information about energy assistance programs call (800) 282-0880 and for a list of energy assistance providers select option 2, or visit www.energyhelp.ohio.gov.

Lifeline for the Empowerment and Development of Consumers was founded in 1973 with the mission of helping Lake County residents by providing them assistance and life skills programming that is designed to increase self-sufficiency. In 1980 Lifeline became a participating agency of the United Way of Lake County, UWLC, and in 1987 was designated a community action agency by the Ohio Development Services Agency, ODSA. In 2008, Lifeline was designated as a mental health agency by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

Today Lifeline continues with the same mission of helping Lake County's low-income residents break the cycle of poverty and make the transition from agency-dependency to self-sufficiency. Lifeline's current programming includes services in the healthcare, housing & energy assistance, information & referral services and consumer education & job training areas. Our motto is 'helping people, changing lives.' Lifeline is currently funded by the UWLC and by grants through the ODSA, the Lake County Board of Commissioners, the Lake County ADAMHS Board, Lake County Department of Job & Family Services, the City of Mentor, the Western Reserve Junior Service League and through private donors.