



News Release

Lifeline, Inc.

PO Box 496, Painesville, OH 44077

(440) 354-2148

carried@lclifeline.org

HEAP Winter Crisis Program Set to Expire May 1, 2020

April 20, 2020

PAINESVILLE, Ohio—The Ohio Development Services Agency (Development) and Lifeline are working to help keep Ohioans safe during this time of emergency. Last month, Governor Mike DeWine declared a state of emergency regarding COVID-19, and Ohio Department of Health Director Amy Acton, M.D., MPH has issued orders to limit social interactions to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Effective immediately, Ohioans who are enrolling in the Percentage of Income Payment Plan Plus (PIPP) for the first time, applying for Home Energy Assistance Winter Crisis Program, or have limited income, are no longer required to visit a local Energy Assistance Provider in order to complete an application.

During the course of this pandemic and the Governor's Stay at Home Order, HEAP applications may be completed over the phone rather than face-to-face. Lake County residents can also visit www.energyhelp.ohio.gov to start their application and upload the required documents prior to their appointment. If you do not have access to the internet and/or cannot upload your documentation, the local Energy Assistance Provider can complete your application over the phone. For a list of required documentation or to schedule an appointment call 440-350-9160.

Lifeline's lobby remains open so that applicants can drop off required documentation. Documentation can also be mailed to the HEAP Office at 54 South State Street, Suite 309, in Painesville, Ohio, 44077.

"Working with our local providers, we have been providing Ohio families with the support they need to manage their energy bills, and now this support is even more important," said Lydia Mihalik, Director of the Ohio Development Services Agency. "The online application, in a normal scenario, makes it easier to apply and reduces the length of an in-person appointment, but now it is providing a bridge to assistance during an incredibly difficult time."

Development will also extend the Winter Crisis Program (WCP) until May 1, 2020 to align with the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio's extended Winter Reconnect Order and the regular Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) will be extended until June 1, 2020.

"We were pleased that the State of Ohio recognized that the need for utility assistance will continue past the original March 31 conclusion of the Winter Crisis Program given our current crisis. We know that with the economic impact of the crisis, more folks than usual will need help preventing disconnections," said Carrie Dotson, Executive Director. "We're also working hard to ensure the safety of both our staff and our clients by limiting face to face contact, so the ability to complete applications over the phone or online are great options for maintaining social distancing practices."

More than 825 families in Lake County were assisted through the Home Energy Assistance Winter Crisis Program last year. As of Friday, April 17, already over \$175,000 have been spent and 625 Lake County households have received assistance.

Development's Interactive Voice Response phone lines will not be available, however Ohioans may continue to call (800) 282-0880 and select option 2, to be transferred to their local Energy Assistance Provider.

The Home Energy Assistance Winter Crisis Program helps income-eligible Ohioans pay their heating bills and can assist with fuel tank placement, fuel tank testing and furnace repair. Ohioans must have a gross income at or below 175% of the federal poverty guidelines to qualify for WCP and HEAP assistance. For a family of four the annual income must be at or below \$45,062.50. Ohioans must have a gross income at or below 150% of the federal poverty guidelines to qualify for PIPP. For a family of four the annual income must be at or below \$38,625.00.

Ohioans that have a regulated utility and have been issued a disconnect notice are eligible for a one-time WCP benefit if they have not already received a WCP or regular HEAP benefit.

For more information about the features of the Winter Crisis Program locally and what is needed to apply, contact Lifeline at 440-350-9160. Additional information can also be found at www.energyhelp.ohio.gov or by calling (800) 282-0880.

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, the Lake County Board of Developmental Disabilities, Lake Health and through private donors.