



News Release

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HEAP Winter Crisis Program Concludes March 31 March 15, 2021

PAINESVILLE, Ohio— The Ohio Development Services Agency and Lifeline, Inc. want to let Ohioans know that time is running out to access assistance to help with their heating bills this winter. The Home Energy Assistance Winter Crisis Program began November 1 and helps income-eligible Ohioans pay their heating bills and can assist with fuel tank placement, fuel tank testing, and furnace repair. The program will be open until March 31, 2021.

“As the pandemic continues into the winter, it is important that Ohioans are able to stay safe and warm in their homes,” said Lydia Mihalik, director of the Ohio Development Services Agency. “The Winter Crisis Program can ease the burdens of families. Ohioans who need help with their energy bills should visit energyhelp.ohio.gov to learn more about the program.”

As of March 15, 496 Lake County households have applied for assistance, with 288 being approved and over \$116,000 allocated for local residents.

“With the financial impacts of COVID-19 on our residents and local community, we anticipate more people than ever needing help with heat, particularly once the utility companies resume disconnections,” said Carrie Dotson, Executive Director at Lifeline. “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.”

The Winter Crisis Program assists low-income households that have been disconnected (or have a pending disconnection notice), need to establish new service, need to pay to transfer service, have 25% (or less) of bulk fuel supply remaining, or have a household member who was diagnosed with COVID-19 in 2020 to help stay warm this winter.

Due to COVID-19 precautions, all application intake will be scheduled by appointments only and may be offered by phone interviews. A very limited number of in-person appointments will be available by appointment only for those with utilities already disconnected. No walk-in sessions will be held. Customers will be called within 15 minutes of their scheduled appointment times. Appointments will be added daily for the following business day to accommodate critical circumstances.

Ohioans can visit www.energyhelp.ohio.gov to start their application prior to their required agency interview with Lifeline. This year appointments will primarily be held over the phone with Lifeline staff. To schedule an appointment call, 1-440-381-8230 or visit <https://app.capappointments.com/>

Eligible households can receive a payment for their main heating source and/or their secondary heating source (electric). The program can also 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 assistance. For a family of four, the annual income must be at or below \$45,850.

For more information about the Winter Crisis Program locally and what is needed to apply, contact Lifeline’s Energy Assistance Office at 440-350-9160 or visit our website at www.lclifeline.org. Lifeline’s office re-located in

June 2020 and is now located at One Victoria Place, Suite 265A in Painesville. Additional information can also be found at www.energyhelp.ohio.gov or by calling (800) 282-0880.

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 will 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.

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. Lifeline received interim designation as Geauga County’s community action agency in 2020.

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.