News Release

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HEAP Winter Crisis Program Continues Through March 31

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PAINESVILLE, Ohio— The Ohio Department of Development and Lifeline want to ensure Ohioans stay warm and comfortable this winter by helping alleviate the burden of costly energy bills.

From Nov. 1, 2024 through March 31, 2025, income-eligible Ohioans can receive one-time assistance with their home energy bill through the Department of Development's Home Energy Assistance Winter Crisis Program.

The Winter Crisis Program assists Ohioans facing service disconnection, those who have already been disconnected, individuals needing to establish new service, those required to pay for a service transfer, and those with a Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) default or who need to make their first PIPP payment. It also supports households with 25 percent or less of bulk fuel in their tank to maintain service. Qualifying households must have a gross annual income at or below 175 percent of the federal poverty level. For a family of four, that is $54,600.

"When temperatures drop this winter, no one should have to worry about if they can afford to keep their home warm," said Lydia Mihalik, Director of the Ohio Department of Development. "Every year, this program serves as a lifeline for thousands of Ohioans, ensuring they can stay safe and comfortable during our coldest months."

Last year, the Winter Crisis Program assisted nearly 77,000 households in Ohio, providing a total of $23.5 million in benefits. More than 560 households in Lake County were assisted through the Home Energy Assistance Winter Crisis Program from November 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024, with nearly $170,000 in federal HEAP funds expended. Already 289 Lake County households have applied for assistance in just the first two months of the program, with 220 being approved.

"It's already been a brutal winter here in northeast Ohio, with a lot of snow, wind and below freezing cold. We're seeing that reflected with this high demand early in the season," said Carrie Dotson, Executive Director at Lifeline. "We know our winters can be harsh, particularly here 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."

Households serviced by a Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO)-regulated utility must sign up for PIPP or another payment plan if there is still an outstanding balance on the utility bill after receiving assistance.

Same day appointments will be added daily for customers who are disconnected. Please call 440-350-9160 if you meet these guidelines for same day appointments. Ohioans can visit www.energyhelp.ohio.gov to start

their application prior to their required agency interview with Lifeline. To schedule an appointment call, 1-440-381-8230 or visit https://app.capappointments.com/

Ohioans can visit energyhelp.ohio.gov to begin an application online, download a copy of the application, or find contact information for a local Energy Assistance Provider. Individuals will need to have copies of the following documents to include with their application:

- Most recent utility bills
- A list of all household members (including birth dates and Social Security numbers)
- Proof of income for the past 30 days for all household members (12 months for certain income types)
- Proof of U.S. citizenship or legal residency for all household members
- Proof of disability (if applicable)

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 is located at 8 N. State Street, Suite 300 in Painesville. Additionally, Lifeline offers appointments at the Wickliffe Family Resource Center on Mondays. Appointments at Wickliffe Family Resource Center can be made by calling the appointment line at 440-381-8230. Additional information can also be found at www.energyhelp.ohio.gov or by calling (800) 282-0880.

Beginning January 2, Lifeline's new office hours are Monday through Thursday from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. The office is closed on Fridays. Lifeline's office will be closed on Monday, February 17 in observance of Presidents' Day.

Applications for the HEAP Winter Crisis program must be received by March 31, 2025. The last day to apply for the regular HEAP benefit is May 31, 2025. For more information on the programs, visit energyhelp.ohio.gov or call Lifeline, Inc.

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 five 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. 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 175 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 Department of Development 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 Department of Development,

ODOD. 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 & Geauga Counties' 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, guardianship, and financial education. Our motto is 'helping people, changing lives.' Lifeline is currently funded by the UWLC and by grants through the ODOD, 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 and through private donors.