



NLIEC NEWS, December 31, 2008

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***Within the Energy Assistance Community ...***

**· Survey Shows Increased Benefits in Most States**

Since Congress doubled LIHEAP funding to \$5.1 billion for Fiscal Year 2009, at least 38 states are increasing energy assistance and less than 20 are expanding their income eligibility guidelines, according to a recent survey of state LIHEAP directors by the **LIHEAP Clearinghouse** and the **National Energy Assistance Directors' Association**.

For FY 2009, under the Continuing Resolution legislation that increased LIHEAP funding, states are allowed to increase their maximum income eligibility levels to the higher of 150 percent of the HHS poverty guidelines or 75 percent of their state's median income. The legislation supersedes current law on LIHEAP income eligibility -- 150 percent of the federal poverty level or 60 percent of state median income -- for FY 2009 only.

California and Wyoming were the only two states that adopted the higher eligibility level for regular energy assistance, but several states have approved significant increases. The LIHEAP Clearinghouse and NEADA are members of the National Low Income Energy Consortium Board of Directors. — **LIHEAP Clearinghouse/National Center for Appropriate Technology News Bulletin**, December 2008

Read more at: <http://www.liheap.ncat.org/newslett/1enews.htm>

**· NARUC Report Projects Snapshot of Utility Bill Arrearages**

A new national survey finds that nearly 40 million electricity and natural gas residential consumers held nearly \$8.7 billion in past due-accounts at the end of the 2007-2008 winter heating season. The survey, released by the **National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners**, also concluded that 8.7 million residential consumers had their electricity or natural gas service terminated in calendar year 2007 for failing to pay their bills, with 3.6 million still disconnected as of last May.

The 2008 NARUC Collections Survey Report is a national snapshot of regulated utility arrearages and terminations from October 2007 and May 2008, before and after the recent winter heating season.

Forty states and the District of Columbia submitted data collected from individual electric and gas utilities that are regulated by state public service commissions. NARUC began collecting this information in 2002, and participation has steadily increased from 16 states to 31 in 2006.

NARUC is the Washington association representing the state public service commissioners who regulate essential utility services such as electricity, natural gas, telecommunications, and water. It is a member of the National Low Income Energy Consortium Board of Directors. The report was compiled by NARUC's Consumer Affairs Committee.

Read more at: <http://www.naruc.org/News/default.cfm?pr=117>

#### **• Stakeholders Ask Obama to Support Increased Funding**

Three national organizations -- the National Association of State Energy Officials, National Energy Assistance Directors' Association and the National Association for Community Services – have sent a letter to President-elect Barack Obama urging him to support increased energy-assistance funding in Fiscal Year 2009.

Their letter, sent to the president-elect December 9, asked him to support raising the appropriation for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) from \$5.1 billion to \$7.6 billion, the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) from \$477 to \$977 million and the State Energy Program (SEP) from \$50 million to \$125 million. "As state officials, we recognize the fiscal challenges that your Administration will be facing after you take office in January," the letter said. "Energy prices have continued to remain high and unaffordable for many Americans.

According to data provided by the federal Energy Information Administration, home energy prices have increased by almost 50 percent in the past five years – from \$681 during the winter of 2002-03 to \$990 last year.

We expect costs will be at the same or higher levels this coming winter." The letter signed by the chairs of the three organizations cited not only the need for greater funding but the success of the three programs.

In conclusion, it said: "The Obama Administration has an historic opportunity to address the energy needs of our nation and move to a new energy future. The critical basis for that progress will be increased funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, the Weatherization Assistance Program and the State Energy Program." NEADA is a member of the National Low Income Energy Consortium Board of Directors. — *Mark Wolfe, NEADA*

#### **• Edward Gingold of FERC Featured in Washington Post Publication**

Edward Gingold, an attorney with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and FERC's alternate representative to the NLIEC Board of Directors, was featured in the December 9, 2008, edition of *Express*, a publication of *The Washington Post*.

The article, attached to this newsletter as a PDF, focused on Gingold in his role as manager of the FERC team working with the Combined Federal Campaign of the National Capital Area. He just entered his fifth year in that capacity, leading a team of 75 volunteers who encourage their colleagues at the federal commission to contribute to the CFC.

The Combined Federal Campaign provides a vehicle through which employees of the federal government can make charitable contributions to a host of non-profit organizations. One of Gingold's goals is to work with NLIEC to help it be added to the list of CFC-eligible non-profits.

### ***In the States ...***

#### **· Nevada Gets New Welfare Director**

A veteran state worker is the new head of the Nevada Welfare and Supportive Services Division, succeeding Nancy Ford who retired. Romaine Gilliland was deputy fiscal administrator for 18 months and before that he was chief financial officer with the state Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation.

The appointment to the \$106,150 a year job was announced by Mike Willden, director of the state Department of Health and Human Services, who described Gilliland as a "solid leader." The division oversees the temporary assistance for needy families program, food stamps, child support enforcement and energy assistance for low income households. — ***Las Vegas (NV) Sun, December 5, 2008***

### ***In the News ...***

#### **· Hawaii Families Feel Pain of Costly Utilities**

Forget about whether there's money this year for presents under the Christmas tree. For many Hawaii families, it's struggle enough to keep the electricity on and pay for other necessities in the wake of job layoffs, pay cuts and increased living costs.

Electricity, water, sewer, phone and basic cable TV service alone can easily add up to more than \$300 a month for a typical household. Some utility agencies report that more customers are delaying bill payment or paring services.

"So far this year, the number of disconnects for nonpayment appears to have increased somewhat, although the majority of those are later reconnected as soon as customers are able to work out a payment system and get back on track," said Hawaiian Electric Co. spokesman Peter Rosegg. — ***Honolulu (HI) Advertiser, December 1, 2008***

**Read more at:** <http://www.honoluluadvertiser.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081201/NEWS26/812010354&s=d&page=2>

## · **Already Rattled by Recession Fears, West Virginians Brace for Winter Heating Costs**

As he helps disabled West Virginians stay in their homes, Larry Paxton has another worry: How they're going to keep those homes warm this winter? Paxton is director of the Appalachian Center for Independent Living, which along with allied groups and community action agencies works with residents across the state.

After a summer of high fuel prices, the looming recession has half the consumers Paxton works with concerned about home heating costs. The ongoing economic downturn is also strapping churches, charities and other groups that previously offered assistance.

"We basically have to beat the bushes trying to find people help," Paxton said. "My staff has personally donated space heaters and delivered them to people."

The disabled, elderly and low-income working families are all at risk this winter, officials say. Family breadwinners face layoff or wage cut fears. The rising cost of food, prescription drugs and other essentials may also eat into funds for utility bills. — **Associated Press, December 1, 2008**

**Read more at:** <http://money.cnn.com/news/newsfeeds/articles/apwire/9562d08e9aa8f3fd577b9cc84e2b6910.htm>

## · **Winter's Chill Held at Bay For Some Low Income Iowa Families**

Average grant sizes are up \$160 for families qualifying for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) this winter. Iowa received about \$77 million in federal money for the program and average grants this heating season will be \$550.

"It's almost double from last year," said Sue Reed, Mid-Sioux Opportunity's outreach coordinator for Plymouth County.

Last year approximately 615 Plymouth County families were approved for assistance through LIHEAP and received an average of \$390 per household. Reed expects a similar amount of applications this year based on the flow of people already applying. — **Le Mars (IA) Daily Sentinel, December 2, 2008**

**Read more at:** <http://www.lemarssentinel.com/story/1482377.html>

## · **Volunteers Swarm to Insulate Elders From Cold**

Eleven a.m. The sun just began to rise over Kotzebue and a light blue glow hinted at a clear, crisp day to come. Perhaps crisp is an understatement. The eyelashes and nostril hairs of 25 teams of volunteers were frosted with tiny crystals of ice and every breath was visible from a distance. Temperatures hovered at 18 to 20 below.

But the cold would not stop the teams from completing their mission: To weatherize 75 elders' homes in preparation for the long winter ahead. Adrenalin alone seemed to make everyone

forget about their freezing faces. — **Anchorage (AK) Arctic Sounder, December 2, 2008**

Read more at: <http://thearticsounder.com/news/show/4059>

· **Expect a Higher Winter Heating Bill in New Mexico**

Customers of PNM can expect higher natural gas prices for the month of December, company spokeswoman Susan Sponar said. Customers will pay \$0.5930 per therm, which represents an 11 percent increase over November's rate of 54 cents per therm.

"It's typical that as the weather gets colder and demand increases, the price goes up," Sponar told the Sun-News. Despite the increase, there is good news for PNM customers.

According to a press release from the company, PNM's December rate in 2007 was 77 cents per therm, which represents a 23 percent decrease compared to this December's rate. — **Silver City (NM) Sun-News, December 3, 2008**

Read more at: [http://www.scsun-news.com/ci\\_11124480](http://www.scsun-news.com/ci_11124480)

· **Cherokee Nation Human Services Not Seeing More Aid Requests**

As the country's economy slumps and people lose jobs, some social service agencies are seeing more clients. But that's not the case for Cherokee Nation Human Services.

Norma Merriman, Human Services group leader, said the tribe's Family Assistance program numbers have fluctuated during the last few months, but none of the CNHS programs have shown "a steady, sustained upswing in numbers."

Merriman said she has seen an increase in Food Distribution numbers, but eligibility guidelines are more lax than most CNHS programs, allowing lower-income working families to qualify depending on family size.

"Right now the layoffs in manufacturing ... do result in more people out of work," Merriman said. "But many qualify for unemployment (benefits), and that will usually put them above eligibility for our Family Assistance programs." ... As unemployment benefits run out, she believes CNHS will begin to get more service requests. — **Tahlequah (OK) Cherokee Phoenix, December 3, 2008**

Read more at: <http://www.cherokeephoenix.org/3202/Article.aspx>

· **Oil Dealers Deny Urging Aid Boycott**

The trade group that represents hundreds of Connecticut heating oil dealers is strongly denying allegations by the attorney general that it urged dealers to boycott a state energy assistance program last year.

State Attorney General Richard Blumenthal said Wednesday an investigation by his office found the Independent Connecticut Petroleum Association "attempted to instigate a boycott of

the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program for the 2007-08 heating oil season at its annual chapter meetings last year.”

The program, known as CEAP and administered by the Department of Social Services, provides heating oil to eligible low-income households throughout the state using government funds. ... Blumenthal claims that the petroleum group, dissatisfied with the reimbursement rates oil dealers receive, urged its members to boycott the program last year — an allegation the group says is untrue.

“At no time did ICPA ever suggest or recommend to anyone that they should not participate in the CEAP,” said Gene Guilford, the petroleum organization’s president and chief executive officer. — ***New Haven (CT) Register, December 4, 2008***

**Read more at:** [http://www.nhregister.com/articles/2008/12/04/business/e1-\\_oil4.txt](http://www.nhregister.com/articles/2008/12/04/business/e1-_oil4.txt)

#### · **Charities Brace for a Rough Future**

Last December David Lee approached the last day of the United Way of Wyoming Valley’s fundraising campaign with uncertainty. As it came time for the nonprofit Pennsylvania agency’s executive director to prepare a final tally he made his best estimate at 4 p.m. “At 4:30 I upped it,” Lee said last week, recalling his surprise at topping the previous year’s total.

This year, however, as the recession gripping the country shows no sign of easing, he’s prepared for another surprise.

Throughout the region the demands on nonprofits have increased as layoffs mount, high energy bills sap household budgets and home foreclosures force the people who once donated to the agencies turn to them for assistance. “We’re going to be impacted in ways that people never even thought of,” Lee said. — ***Wilkes Barre (PA) Times Leader, December 5, 2008***

**Read more at:** [http://www.timesleader.com/news/Charities\\_brace\\_for\\_a\\_rough\\_future\\_12-05-2008.html](http://www.timesleader.com/news/Charities_brace_for_a_rough_future_12-05-2008.html)

#### · **Heating Help Event Turns Chaotic**

People heated up over heating vouchers disrupted an event on Saturday at Lizzie Chapel Baptist Church in Macon, Georgia.

Sarita Hill with the Macon Energy Assistance Program says day two of their Holiday Heating Help Initiative was cut short after dozens of people got unruly and had to be removed by police. She says one man was arrested and charged with disorderly conduct.

More than 200 others woke up early for day two of the Macon EOC’s home heating help program only to be turned away before they could get their vouchers, because of confusion and safety concerns.

Lonnie Miley, who helped organize the program, says the confusion began after some people passed out a fake sign-up list before energy assistance volunteers showed up. When the volunteers explained it's first come, first serve for the people lined up at the doors, those on the list who weren't lined up lost their place and ultimately their temper. — **WMAZ-TV, Macon, GA, December 6, 2008**

**Read more at:** <http://www.13wmaz.com/article/20081206/NEWS01/81206007>

#### · **Record Numbers Asking for Home Heating Help**

Residents in Butler County and Ohioans statewide are on pace to receive a record amount of assistance with their heating bills this winter. Supports to Encourage Low Income Families has helped 1,012 families get funds through the Home Energy Assistance Program and Emergency Home Energy Assistance Program as of Dec. 1, about 50 percent more than this time last year.

“Last winter we served the second largest number of households in our history and we’re almost exceeding that and are on our way to an all-time record,” said Jeffrey Diver, director of SELF, which serves residents countywide. — **Oxford (OH) Press, December 6, 2008**

**Read more at:** <http://www.oxfordpress.com/hp/content/oh/story/news/local/2008/12/06/hjn120608heap.html>

#### · **2008-09: A Winter of Discontent?**

Get ready for a cold winter. That's the message from Mary Lemcke, New Hampshire's climatologist, who says weather patterns indicate this year's winter will be a degree or so colder than last year's on average.

She said while that may not sound like a lot, there will be some very cold days in there to help bring that total down. Lemcke acknowledged that an economic recession and fluctuating heating fuel prices will likely make the winter's bite harder to take.

“This is not the best winter for below-average temperatures,” Lemcke said. “It might be a long, bitter type of winter.” The number of below-average temperature days has already been unusually high, she said. — **Portsmouth (NH) Herald, December 7, 2008**

**Read more at:** <http://www.seacoastonline.com/articles/20081207-NEWS-812070330>

#### · **Energy Assistance Program Brimming**

Brandy Scott had a bad 2008. The certified nurse's aide was bitten by a spider in January. The infected bite turned into a bacterial nightmare, and she lost a good chunk of her leg from the surgeries needed to stop the infection. So she wasn't able to return to work.

And then her husband, George, lost his retail store job. The Scotts are raising four children in a big, drafty house in northeast Spokane. The home is heated by natural gas. Through a chance conversation with a friend, Scott learned that she was likely eligible for heating

assistance to help pay part of her winter heating bill that averages \$300 a month.

The federal program is called LIHEAP, which stands for Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, and it's awash in funds – \$5.1 billion for 2009 – thanks to bipartisan legislation signed Sept. 30 by President Bush. — **Spokane (WA) Spokesman-Review, December 9, 2008**

**Read more at:** <http://www.spokesmanreview.com/breaking/story.asp?ID=18153>

#### · **Weatherization Program Teaches Trades to Workers**

Skilled trade workers in Illinois are urged to participate in the Illinois Home Weatherization Assistance Program, which is designed to help create jobs, provide job training for more than 700 skilled trade workers and stimulate local economies.

Workers will take part in on-the-job training, which to allow them to develop the technical knowledge needed to do quality skilled weatherization work.

“Weatherization helps to create jobs providing work for small contractors throughout Illinois helping to boost the economy,” said Barry Maram, director of the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services. “We’re very pleased that we could help generate additional employment and assist families that really need help making ends meet during these tough times.” — **Belleville (IL) News-Democrat, December 10, 2008**

**Read more at:** <http://www.bnd.com/business/story/573092.html>

#### · **All She Wanted for Christmas Was Heat**

It wasn't exactly a letter to Santa, but in her e-mail to What's Your Problem? Dec. 3, Natalia Piekarski made it painfully clear there was only one thing on her holiday wish list: Heat.

The 21-year-old and her mother had been shivering in their Bensenville home since Nicor turned off the gas in October because she had fallen behind on her bill, and then gotten trapped by a bureaucratic snafu that incorrectly identified her residence as a commercial property.

As she typed the e-mail, the thermostat inside her two-flat dipped below 40 degrees. “I wasn't able to have Thanksgiving dinner with my family this year because we had no gas to work the stove or hot water,” Piekarski lamented. “My fear is that Christmas will be the same.” — **Chicago Tribune, December 11, 2008**

**Read more at:** <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/columnists/chi-thu-problem-1211-dec11,0,7393123.column>

#### · **Arizona to Get More Energy Aid for Poor, Still Lags Cold States**

After the scorching summer heat and before the onset of winter in Arizona's mountainous reaches, Washington agreed to triple utility aid to the state's poor this year.

But once again, Arizonans will receive comparatively little help with their heating and cooling bills from a program that remains tilted heavily toward those in the Northeast and the Rust Belt, said Sandra Mendez, who directs the state's portion of a federal program to help the needy cope with energy costs.

Amid a recession and with taxpayers on the hook for hundreds of billions of dollars in bailouts, it is no small feat that funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, or LIHEAP, doubled to \$5.1 billion this fiscal year. — **Phoenix (AZ) Arizona Republic, December 13, 2008**

**Read more at:** <http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/news/articles/2008/12/13/20081213liheap1213.html>

#### · **Utility Cost, Delinquent Payments on the Rise**

The first day of winter is still a week away, but New Jersey utility companies already are seeing a steep rise in the number of customers having trouble paying their bills.

Officials with South Jersey Gas, which serves 337,000 customers in the seven southernmost counties in the state, have seen a 15 percent increase in delinquent accounts between January and October.

“We try to be as flexible as we can,” company spokeswoman Joanne Brigandi said. “We can make payment arrangements. We try to work with the customers.”

Officials with PSE&G, which provides gas and electricity to about 75 percent of the state, said the number of customers who failed to pay their bill for at least two months has risen by 8 percent. There also are more customers asking for help. — **Cherry Hill (NJ) Courier-Post, December 14, 2008**

**Read more at:** <http://www.courierpostonline.com/article/20081214/NEWS01/812140359/1006/news01>

#### · **Aid Agencies Stretched Thin**

Out of nowhere everything turned upside down. Working the keys one May morning at the Butter Maid Bakery in Ross Park Mall, John Carpenter peered inside and saw all the gear was gone. The general manager of the franchise, with 20 years of baking experience and authority to hire and fire other workers, he realized it had gone belly up overnight. He was now one of those people without a job, looking in from the other side.

Nights turned into months. Despite having his mother drive him up and down McKnight Road putting up applications at every restaurant he saw open, there was still nothing. Unemployment checks got him \$424 a month but rent at his Millvale apartment was \$450. A kindly landlord let him slide a couple times but that wouldn't last. — **Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, December 14, 2008**

Read more at: <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/08349/935096-85.stm>

### · **Energy Assistance Plentiful This Winter**

Despite high numbers of utility shutoffs, a jump in the number of Pennsylvania households entering winter without a safe source of heat, and a deepening recession, there is at least one ray of hope on the Energy front: A major expansion this winter in access to energy assistance.

Yesterday, the Public Utility Commission said Pennsylvania gas and electric utilities had cut off service to a record 296,197 households at some point in the first 11 months of the year, up 20 percent from last year. The commission also reported that 17,745 homes across the state still lacked a safe source of central heat at the start of December, up 5 percent from 2007. Almost half were in Philadelphia and surrounding counties.

That was the bad news, and PUC officials stressed the risks that occur when people rely on kerosene or electric space heaters as alternative heat sources. But state and utility officials said the good news was that significantly more aid was available this winter -- including to those the commission calls the "new poor," victims of the current recession. — **Philadelphia Inquirer, December 17, 2008**

Read more at: [http://www.philly.com/philly/business/20081217\\_Energy\\_assistance\\_plentiful\\_this\\_winter.html](http://www.philly.com/philly/business/20081217_Energy_assistance_plentiful_this_winter.html)

### · **Duke Program Assists Needy**

Duke Energy Ohio is implementing a new pilot program for low-income natural gas customers to help them conserve energy and save money this winter. The program is designed for customers who are at or below 175 percent of the federal poverty guideline, do not qualify for the Percentage of Income Payment Plan and who use less than 900 ccf of natural gas annually, said Johnna Reeder, spokeswoman for Duke.

In addition, the first 10,000 Duke natural gas customers to enroll will receive a monthly credit of \$4 to partially offset increases in the monthly fixed charges for natural gas service approved in May 2008 by the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio. — **Middletown (OH) Journal, December 17, 2008**

Read more at: <http://www.middletownjournal.com/hp/content/oh/story/news/local/2008/12/17/hjn121708duke.html>

### · **Dad Pleads Guilty in Tot Fire Deaths**

From the start, authorities said Ryan Donachy played a role in the fire a year ago that killed two of his three children when he bought crack with money that relatives gave him to restore electricity at his Swatara Township home in Pennsylvania.

On Tuesday, Donachy agreed and pleaded guilty in Dauphin County Court to involuntary manslaughter, halting the second day of his murder trial in which his wife, Debbie, was

expected to testify against him. Donachy, 26, also pleaded guilty to three counts of aggravated assault and endangering the welfare of children. The deal, offered before the trial, leaves him facing 3½ to 7 years in prison. — **Harrisburg (PA) Patriot-News, December 17, 2008**

**Read more at:** <http://www.pennlive.com/news/patriotnews/index.ssf?/base/news/122948520891090.xml&coll=1>

See also:

“Case Highlights Growing Risks of Utility Cutoffs,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 13, 2008, <http://www.philly.com/philly/news/homepage/36097674.html>

### · **Demands on Charities Increase, but Contributions Fluctuate**

With the giving season in full swing and a national economic recession worrying most Americans, many charitable organizations across the country are reporting fewer donations but more demand for their help.

According to an October survey from GuideStar, a provider of statistical information on non-profit organizations, 60 percent of charitable organizations reported that contributions either stayed the same or decreased in the first nine months of 2008, compared to 44 percent in 2007. Sixty-four percent reported that demand increased during that time.

The survey included 107 charities from the Rocky Mountain Region, which includes Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho, Montana and Utah. Among these organizations, 36 percent reported that contributions decreased in the first nine months of 2008, 40 percent reported increased contributions and 22 percent reported that contributions remained about the same. — **Torrington (WY) Telegram, December 19, 2008**

**Read more at:** [http://www.torringtontelegram.com/V2\\_news\\_articles.php?heading=0&story\\_id=2644&page=34](http://www.torringtontelegram.com/V2_news_articles.php?heading=0&story_id=2644&page=34)

### · **Economic Freeze Leaves Some in the Cold**

Thousands more Missourians have had their natural gas service shut off for nonpayment this year than in previous years, another sign of a faltering economy that's left hundreds of thousands across the state without jobs and cost some residents their homes.

Statewide, more than 200,000 natural-gas customers were disconnected for nonpayment through October, according to data provided by utilities to the Missouri Public Service Commission. The number is up 4 percent from the same period last year, and 40 percent higher than in 2005. Illinois doesn't provide specific figures for natural gas disconnections. — **St. Louis (MO) Post-Dispatch, December 21, 2008**

**Read more at:** <http://www.stltoday.com/stltoday/business/stories.nsf/yourmoney/story/AD8E700E344A73DA862575250007A991?OpenDocument>

### · **Frigid Weather Raises Heating Concerns**

More Pennsylvanians are cut off from utility heating going into the winter than last year, bringing fears that they'll rely on fire-prone sources to heat their homes. "We did see the numbers go up, which is concerning," said press secretary Jennifer Kocher of the state's Public Utility Commission. "The economy plays into it somewhat."

The commission's annual Cold Weather Survey showed that 14,364 households have no heat-related utility service, such as natural gas or heating oil. That is up 4.4 percent – from 13,762 in 2007. She said the numbers had declined from 2006 to 2007. — ***Johnstown (PA) Tribune-Democrat, December 22, 2008***

**Read more at:** [http://www.tribune-democrat.com/local/local\\_story\\_357231746.html](http://www.tribune-democrat.com/local/local_story_357231746.html)

#### · **46,000 Get Aid for Heat So Far**

The state of Maine's housing agency has processed more than 48,500 applications for heating assistance, officials announced Monday. Nearly 46,000 Maine households have been approved to receive heating assistance so far.

MaineHousing has also paid out \$28 million in heating assistance benefits, officials said. "Our energy department staff and the staff of the Community Action Program agencies have been working nights and weekends to get the benefits out to qualifying low-income households as quickly as possible," Dale McCormick, MaineHousing's director, said in a release Monday.

McCormick said she expects about 70,000 Maine households to receive funds through the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, also known as LIHEAP, by the time heating season is over. — ***Kennebec (ME) Journal, December 23, 2008***

**Read more at:** <http://kennebecjournal.maintoday.com/news/local/5743152.html>

#### · **Lights Out Could Mean Being Put Out**

Imagine being evicted from your apartment because your lights were shut off for non-payment. That's what happened to Sharon Mosby, 42, who was evicted in October from her North Side apartment.

"My heat and water was included in the rent, but I had to pay for my own electric," she said. "And once you get too far behind on a light bill, it's hard to catch up. I just needed a little more time, but my landlord had me set out."

For renters like Mosby, struggling to keep their electricity on to prevent eviction, there is a new fund available to provide assistance. Grants are available from The Homeless Prevention Fund for renters whose lease requires them to maintain electric service. — ***Chicago Defender, December 24, 2008***

**Read more at:** <http://www.chicagodefender.com/article-2808-lights-out-could-mea.html>

#### · **More Households Late in Paying Gas, Electricity Bills**

More than 18 percent of California households were late on their utility bills at the end of last winter and owed on average more than \$140, according to a new survey.

And with tougher economic times still ahead, the number of people across the nation struggling to make their electric and natural gas payments could rise by the time this winter is over, according to the National Association of Regulatory Commissioners.

The association conducted a survey of utility providers in 41 states and released its findings recently in an effort to help lawmakers decide funding levels for aid programs. — **Riverside (CA) Press-Enterprise, December 28, 2008**

**Read more at:** [http://www.pe.com/localnews/rivcounty/stories/PE\\_News\\_Local\\_S\\_utility29.310d5d0.html](http://www.pe.com/localnews/rivcounty/stories/PE_News_Local_S_utility29.310d5d0.html)

#### · **Citizens Group Calls for Moratorium on Gas and Electric Shutoffs**

A citizens group on Monday called for state lawmakers and officials to bar Baltimore Gas and Electric from terminating service to its 1.1 million residential customers from Jan. 1 through May 31.

The Maryland Coalition to Stop the BGE Rate Hike, formed in 2006 when BGE rates jumped 72 percent, called upon those in power to halt shutoffs through the spring.

“The corporate structure is getting away with murder and we can ill afford to have people freeze to death this winter or suffer in any way,” Leo Burroughs Jr., the group’s chairman, said at a press conference. “We demand a moratorium and we demand it on the basis of human decency and fair play.”

The number of BGE customers who had their power turned off in the last year increased 75 percent, according to a November report by the state’s Public Service Commission, and the amount they owed rose as well. — **Baltimore Examiner, December 29, 2008**

**Read more at:** <http://www.baltimoreexaminer.com/local/123008bge.html>

#### · **Less Money, More Snow Forces Many to Seek Help for Heating Bills**

As snow banks and debt payments both continue to pile up, more Utah County residents than last year are turning to the state government for help keeping their homes warm.

Though it’s early in the winter, the number of households receiving aid in Utah, Wasatch and Summit counties from the state’s Home Energy Assistance Target (HEAT) program has increased by a third over this time last year. Statewide, the numbers are up about 10 percent.

Program manager Sherm Roquero said the income ceiling for eligibility climbed from 125 percent of poverty last year to 150 percent this year, and even people on the high end of the new limit are seeking relief. “We know that quite a few people are getting hit pretty hard by the economy,” he said....

Combined with the local increase from 827 households in 2007 to 1,096 so far this year and the 10,768 being helped to date statewide, the program's price tag looks to be much higher than it was last year. — **Provo (UT) Daily Herald, December 31, 2008**

Read more at: <http://www.heraldextra.com/content/view/294179/3>

### **Editorials ...**

#### **· Congress Approves Heating Help Just in Time**

Just in case people had forgotten how cold it can get around here, and how freezing temperatures increase energy bills, the forecast for this weekend is for overnight temperatures to drop below zero.

In years past, when proponents sought more government aid for people struggling to pay their heating bills, the response was always something like, "Gosh, that's a worthy program and we" like to help, but this is a tough budget year."

So here we are in the worst budget crisis in a long time, and Congress has passed a huge increase in funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. The move calls into question why this wasn't done sooner, but it's better than the usual response. —

**Spokane (WA) Spokesman-Review, December 11, 2008**

Read more at: <http://www.spokesmanreview.com/opinion/story.asp?ID=271852>

#### **· Don't Wait to Ask for Help With Heating**

Winter doesn't officially arrive for another week, but already we've seen a sampling of the cold weather that will be around for the next several months. We've known for some time this winter was going to be particularly harsh for many who are struggling to make ends meet.

New figures released from the state this week provide the proof to support that thinking. More than 47,000 households, a 20 percent increase compared to last year, have been approved for home-heating assistance since mid-August out of more than 67,000 applications filed — and that despite a dramatic decrease in oil prices. — **Norwich (CT) Bulletin, December 17, 2008**

Read more at: <http://www.norwichbulletin.com/opinions/x415882263/Our-View-Don-t-wait-to-ask-for-help-with-heating>

#### **· Shutting Off Heat**

High on any list of the neediest at this time of year should be the 8,800 unfortunate Philadelphia-area families facing the winter without central heating because of utility shutoffs. Far too many people likely will suffer without a basic, life-sustaining necessity most families in the region take for granted.

Even more troubling is that roughly 25 percent more families are without power or gas service

this year than last, Peco Energy Co. and Philadelphia Gas Works reported this week.

Across Pennsylvania, a similar trend is evident in the 20 percent increase in shutoffs tallied by the state Public Utility Commission. It would be an even bleaker landscape but for good news from Washington, Harrisburg and Trenton about a major expansion of energy assistance efforts this winter. — **Philadelphia Inquirer, December 19, 2008**

**Read more at:** [http://www.philly.com/inquirer/opinion/20081219\\_Editorial\\_\\_Shutting\\_off\\_Heat.html](http://www.philly.com/inquirer/opinion/20081219_Editorial__Shutting_off_Heat.html)

### **Commentaries ...**

#### **· Here's a Gift idea: Light and Heat Through Winter**

Remember dire predictions about the price of home heating oil? They have translated into more federal help paying power bills this fall and winter for people with very low incomes.

The trouble comes for people whose income might not hit the poverty level. Perhaps for the first time in their lives, they need help. They're using food banks now, and when the bills for the cold snap hit next month, they'll seek energy assistance.

First the good news. No one who works with emergency energy aid programs can recall a time like now when they were pretty sure their money would last into March. They can't remember being able to tell callers not to worry about the busy signal, just keep calling for an appointment and the assurance of help. — **Kathleen Merryman in the Tacoma (WA) News Tribune, December 17, 2008**

**Read more at:** <http://www.thenewstribune.com/news/columnists/merryman/story/569870.html>

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