

Human Services Reminds Pennsylvanians to Apply for Housing, Utility and Emergency Assistance Programs

Harrisburg, PA – Department of Human Services (DHS) Secretary Teresa Miller today encouraged Pennsylvanians who have been affected financially by the COVID-19 public-health crisis to take advantage of programs designed to help with rent payments and utility bills. Secretary Miller also advised of the upcoming July 12 deadline to apply for the Emergency Assistance Program, a one-time cash assistance program for families and pregnant women who have lost income or employment due to COVID-19.

“Temporary suspensions on eviction, foreclosure, and utility shut-offs are necessary to keep Pennsylvanians safe and housed during these difficult times, but we know that many renters and homeowners who have lost their income could still face eviction, foreclosure, or utility shut-offs when the moratoriums are over. Access to safe, secure housing is essential, and we want to ensure that Pennsylvanians struggling to pay rent or utilities have the help that they need,” said DHS Secretary Teresa Miller. “Anyone who may worry that their housing may be in jeopardy should know that help is available and should not feel afraid to pursue these options.”

Emergency Assistance Program

The Emergency Assistance Program (EAP) helps low-income families who lost wages and are experiencing financial challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The program uses existing federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds and is open to families with a child under the age of 18 or a woman who is currently pregnant. Families who qualify for EAP will be eligible for a one-time payment to assist them in meeting their financial needs and help them secure more stable financial footing in the future.

In order to qualify, families must have at least one person in the household who was employed as of March 11, 2020 and experienced an hour or wage reduction of at least 50 percent for two weeks or more or lost employment entirely due to the public health crisis. Eligible families can possess resources, such as money in checking/savings, of no more than \$1,000 as well.

Qualifying families are issued a one-time grant equal to two months of TANF benefits. Funds will be issued through an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card.

Applications are due by July 12. Families should be prepared to submit all necessary documentation with their application to expedite processing and avoid having to apply again. Applications are accepted at any time, and previously-rejected applications can be resubmitted if they were denied initially.

Housing Assistance

The COVID-19 emergency left many citizens facing the threat of eviction after having their income lost or reduced. DHS is releasing \$10 million through the CARES Act to Pennsylvania counties for the County Homeless Assistance Program (HAP). HAP is a program that offers rental assistance, emergency shelter and supportive housing services to more than 28,000 individuals and families experiencing or at risk for homelessness prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The additional federal funding will help counties with serving the increased needs of at-risk Pennsylvania citizens to prevent homelessness.

The Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) is offering housing-related financial assistance. Applications are available at www.PHFA.org for both rental and mortgage assistance (look for the red CARES banner). All 67 counties have local organizations helping PHFA by processing the rent relief applications. PHFA will process the mortgage relief applications.

Renters who qualify may receive assistance equal to 100 percent of their monthly rent up to \$750 a month for a maximum of six months of assistance for the time period between March 1 and November 30, 2020. For renters to be eligible for financial assistance, they will need to document at least a 30 percent reduction in annual income since March 1 related to COVID-19, or they must have become unemployed after March 1.

The assistance available for homeowners can be up to \$1,000 a month for a maximum period of six months. The time period eligible for assistance is for mortgage payments owed from March 2020 through December 2020. Homeowners who became unemployed after March 1 or who suffered at least a 30 percent reduction in annual income due to reduced work hours and wages related to COVID-19 may be eligible for financial assistance to help with missed mortgage payments.

Utility Assistance

The Pennsylvania Utility Commission (PUC) has clarified that utility shutoff moratoriums are in effect until Governor Wolf's disaster order is lifted. Utility assistance, however, is still available.

DHS administers the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) Crisis Recovery Program, which provides assistance for home energy bills, helping ensure continuity of utility and other energy services for low-income Pennsylvanians. The LIHEAP Recovery Crisis Program offers a crisis benefit for households that received a crisis payment made directly to utility companies or fuel providers to help offset costs for home utilities.

LIHEAP normally runs from November through March, but the Recovery Crisis program can help with Pennsylvanians' current energy costs. Assistance is available for both renters and homeowners. LIHEAP Recovery Crisis program will run through August 31, 2020, or until all budgeted funding is expended.

The electric and natural gas utilities that PUC oversees offer Customer Assistance Programs (CAPs), under which qualifying low-income customers pay discounted bills. Qualification in CAP programs is based on household size and gross household income.

Utilities also have a variety of other options to help consumers, including:

- Budget billing, which takes a customer's annual utility costs and averages them out over 12 months so that bills don't jump up or down from month to month;
- Payment plans to help address past-due bills or delinquent balances over a period of time;
- Various hardship funds supported by utilities and donations from utility customers along with non-profit and charitable organizations operating in the commonwealth; and,
- Lifeline service, a federal financial support program that helps eligible low-income consumers and households to keep their telephone and internet access. More

information on Lifeline is available at www.lifelinesupport.org. You can also call Lifeline at 1-800-234-9473 between 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., seven days a week.

Consumers are urged to call their utility to inquire about such programs. If questions remain after talking with their utility, consumers may call the PUC's Bureau of Consumer Services toll-free at 1-800-692-7380, or submit an [electronic complaint form](#).