

News Release

Lifeline for the Empowerment and Development of Consumers, Inc.

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**Home Energy Assistance Program Winter Crisis Program Set to Start November 1, 2010
October 11, 2010**

PAINESVILLE, Ohio— As temperatures cool this fall, many Ohioans will take for granted the fact that they can turn on their furnaces and heat their homes whenever they wish. Many more, however, will need help purchasing that heat.

The Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) will begin distributing funds to help pay for heating on Nov. 1.

“We anticipate more people than ever needing help with heat due to the economy,” said Carrie Dotson, Executive Director at Lifeline, Inc.

HEAP is a federally funded program designed to help eligible low-income Ohioans meet the high costs of home heating. This program can only be accessed one time per season and the amount of the benefit depends on the size of the household, household income and what type of fuel is used. In most cases, the one-time benefit will be a credit applied directly to an energy bill.

“Ohio winters can be harsh, particularly in northeast Ohio, and this program helps people heat their homes safely without needing to choose between heat and food,” Dotson said.

Emergency HEAP is also available on a once per season basis for customers who have been disconnected or received a shut-off notice, or who have less than a 10-day supply of bulk fuel.

Ohioans also have the option of enrolling in a longer-term plan that allows them to pay a percentage of their income rather than high bills they cannot afford. This year, the Percentage of Income Payment Plan or PIPP becomes PIPP Plus and includes several changes.

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 Coordinator at Lifeline, Inc.

“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. The program is administered by the Ohio Department of Development and the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio.

The Emergency HEAP Winter Crisis Program (WCP) will begin on November 1st and run through March 31, 2011. Lifeline, Inc., Lake County's Community Action Agency, will again administer the HEAP WCP for the 2010-11 season.

Lifeline, Inc. will host a HEAP Kick-off meeting on Monday, October 18 at 3 p.m. at the Lake County Administration Building's lower level conference room, 105 Main St. in Painesville. At the meeting, Lifeline's staff will provide details on the PIPP Plus changes, as well as information on WCP. For those interested in attending the kick-off, please RSVP to Carrie Dotson at Lifeline at (440) 354-2148.

In order to help those who already have a critical energy situation, Lifeline's HEAP program will be hosting special walk-in only days at the start of the program. From Monday, Nov. 1 to Friday, Nov. 12 walk-in sessions will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. The office will be closed on Thursday, Nov. 11 in observance of Veteran's Day. An additional walk-in only day will be held on Saturday, Nov. 6 from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

All walk-in sessions are on a first come, first served basis. Only customers who meet the eligibility requirements and have all required documentation will be able to complete their application process that day. All others will be asked to return on another day or encouraged to schedule an appointment.

After Nov. 12, the Energy Office will offer both scheduled appointments and walk-in hours each week. Appointments can be scheduled by calling our automated appointment line at 1-866-223-1471. This line will also give you a list of the required documents needed to complete an application.

To learn more and enroll in these programs contact Lifeline, Inc.'s Energy Assistance Office at (440) 350-9160. Lifeline's Energy Assistance Office is located at 54 S. State Street, Suite 303 in Painesville.

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.

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 health, housing, energy and consumer education areas. Our motto is 'first to help, then to teach.' Lifeline is currently funded by the UWLC and by grants through the ODOD, the Lake County Board of Commissioners, the Western Reserve Junior Service League, the CVS Foundation, Bikers Aiding Local Diabetics and through private donors.