

# ***News Release***

## **Lifeline for the Empowerment and Development of Consumers, Inc.**

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### **Home Energy Assistance Program Winter Crisis Program Off to a Busy Start December 17, 2014**

**PAINESVILLE, Ohio**— With the very early, sudden cold and snowfall in northeast Ohio, many residents 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) Winter Crisis Program began distributing funds to help pay for heating on Nov. 3 and the application numbers have been very high according to agency officials.

“Our staff has completed applications for 472 households in just the month and a half of the program,” said Carrie Dotson, Executive Director of Lifeline, Inc. “The need for financial assistance with heating bills is so great right now. We anticipate more people than ever before needing help with their heat costs because it has been so cold so early, so I expect those numbers to stay high through December and January.”

Of those 472 applications, 394 have been approved for assistance. Over \$132,000 has already been allocated to help those in need since November 3.

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.

The Emergency HEAP Winter Crisis Program 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, 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 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. Any adult household

member reporting zero income may 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.

The Emergency HEAP Winter Crisis Program (WCP) began on November 3, and run through March 31, 2015. Lifeline, Inc., Lake County's Community Action Agency, will again administer the HEAP WCP for the 2014-2015 season.

The Lifeline Energy Office will offer both scheduled appointments and walk-in hours each week. In order to help those who already have a critical energy situation, Lifeline's HEAP program hosts walk-in assistance every Monday, Wednesday and Friday beginning at 8:30 a.m. Appointments are scheduled on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Appointments can be scheduled by calling our automated appointment line at 1-866-223-1471. This line will also provide callers a list of the required documents needed to complete an application. The office will close at noon on Wednesday, December 24 and re-open on Friday, December 26. The office will close again at noon on Wednesday December 31 and re-open on Friday, January 2.

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.

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 Development Services Agency, ODSA. In 2008, Lifeline was designated as a mental health agency by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

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, Bikers Aiding Local Diabetics and through private donors.