



# News Release

**Lifeline, Inc.**

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## **Home Energy Assistance Program Winter Crisis Program Concludes April 23, 2018**

**PAINESVILLE, Ohio**— The HEAP Winter Crisis Program (WCP), which began on November 1, 2017 and ran through March 30, 2018, served a high number of low-income households with emergency utility assistance.

Throughout the five months of the Winter Crisis Season, Lifeline's staff completed applications for 948 households from nearly every community in Lake County for emergency utility assistance. Of those 948 applications, 829 of them were approved for emergency utility assistance with either their gas or electric or the purchase of fuel oil. Over \$210,000 in federal dollars was expended over the course of the season. This is on average with normal years, but slightly less than last year's winter.

"It was definitely a busy season," said Carrie Dotson, Executive Director at Lifeline. "On our walk-in days we always had a long line at our door of folks waiting for assistance and we were always booked three or four solid weeks out for appointments. The numbers prove what we were seeing every day."

Dotson said that the agency staff was glad to help their neighbors in need. They were also able to help so many residents who had never before sought the help of the program.

"We saw so many new people during the 2017-2018 Heap Winter Crisis Season who had not heard about our program until they read about it in the newspaper," said Marina Rivera, Energy Programs Coordinator at Lifeline.

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 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.

While the Winter Crisis Program has ended for the season, Lifeline's Energy Assistance Office still provides assistance enrolling Lake County residents on the PIPP Plus plan.

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 Rivera.

"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. To learn more about 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 and through private donors.