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New Mexico Receives Enough LIHEAP Funding to Double Average Benefit

Human Services Department Encourages Families to Apply Now for Home Energy Assistance

Santa Fe, New Mexico – The New Mexico Human Services Department is pleased to announce this year’s funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is enough to double the average benefit for New Mexico families from last year.

“This is good news during difficult economic times for New Mexico families as we approach the cold weather season,” said Secretary Pamela Hyde, Human Services Department Secretary. “We anticipate we’ll serve even more families this year who will receive an average one-time benefit of \$300 to apply toward their electric, natural gas, propane, fire wood, or wood pellet bills.”

The combined state and federal funding for energy assistance totals nearly \$30 million, which will go to fund both the State and Tribal LIHEAP programs, as well the weatherization program through the Mortgage Finance Authority.

The LIHEAP program begins each year in October and goes through September. Last year nearly 66,000 New Mexico families received help with their energy bills through this program with an average benefit of \$134.

Each year beginning November 15 through March 15 a moratorium on utility disconnections for low-income families is in effect. The moratorium is designed to keep low-income New Mexico households from getting their utilities turned off during the coldest months of the year. However, the moratorium does require that clients be current with last seasons heating bills on November 15 in order to receive the protection.

“We encourage families to apply now for their LIHEAP benefit to help them get current with their bills,” said Katie Falls, Human Services Department Deputy Secretary. “Another alternative is to work out a payment plan with the energy company prior to the moratorium’s start date and keep up with the plan to receive the protection during the winter months.”

Another benefit to applying for LIHEAP early is to buy bulk fuels now, such as propane, when the costs are less expensive than the winter months. According to the National Energy Assistance Directors Association, those who use propane to heat their homes can expect a 30 percent increase this winter. “For that reason, the Human Services Department is offering additional funding for households who use their LIHEAP benefit for propane costs,” said Falls. Electric heat is projected to increase seven percent and natural gas five percent above last winter’s costs.

Households qualifying for LIHEAP earn at or below 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. For example, a family of three with a monthly income of \$2,200 could qualify for home heating help (see guide below). The benefit can be used to help pay gas, electric, or bulk fuels, such as propane, firewood or wood pellet bills.

HSD has also simplified the eligibility process for LIHEAP applicants who currently use other income support programs such as food stamps, cash assistance or Medicaid. Those clients may not have to provide new proof of their circumstances.

Households applying for but who are not currently clients of the Income Support Division should bring the following to one of the department’s 36 Income Support offices:

- Proof of household income for the past 30 days
- Identification
- Social Security Numbers (SSN) for all household members
- Proof of New Mexico residency
- If not a U.S. Citizen, proof of qualified immigrant status
- Proof of a heating or cooling expense

<i>Family Size</i>	<i>LIHEAP Maximum Monthly Income</i>
1	\$1,300
2	\$1,750
3	\$2,200
4	\$2,650
5	\$3,100
6	\$3,550
7	\$4,000
8	\$4,450

For more information on LIHEAP, please visit your local Income Support Division office, call 1-800-283-4465, or visit the department’s LIHEAP website at <http://www.hsd.state.nm.us/isd/liheap.html>.

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