



NEWS RELEASE

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Low-income families will get extra help with heating bills

An estimated 1,000 lower-income families in Hamilton County will qualify for a new program that provides extra help with heating bills this winter. Each family could get up to \$1,000 to pay bills that are higher than the family's budget billing amount for the winter heating season.

The Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services (HCJFS) will receive about \$1 million in state welfare dollars to provide the extra help. HCJFS is beginning a contract with Accountability and Credibility Together (ACT), which will administer the new program. ACT is a local social service agency that helps people break the welfare cycle.

Like many states around the country, Ohio is worried that its low-income citizens will suffer this winter because home heating costs are expected to rise dramatically. Many of the nation's poor rely on the state and federal Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) to help to pay utility bills. But extra federal money to meet the higher costs will probably not materialize this year. Ohio's response has been to tap state welfare dollars to help low-income families.

Eligible families who do not participate in the new program, may still receive a one-time heating assistance payment of about \$400 through HEAP. HEAP applications are available by calling 1-800-282-0880. They are also available at libraries, social service agencies, county departments of Job and Family Services, Area Agencies on Aging and utility offices.

Income-eligible households who have a disconnection notice or less than a ten-day supply of fuel oil can receive help from E-HEAP, an emergency assistance program administered by the Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency (CAA). The program pays one-time benefits of \$175 to avoid a heat cut-off or to restore service. This program is available only by applying at CAA.

For people on the financial edge, high heating bills can bring worse consequences than being cold all winter.

“High utility bills can send lower income people into a downward spiral that is very hard to reverse,” said Jim Ashmore of Job and Family Services.

In October, Gov. Taft authorized \$75 million in Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) funds to be used statewide to supplement the \$100 million in Ohio’s HEAP. More recently, the state authorized more TANF money that will bring the additional \$1 million in heating assistance to Hamilton County families.

The extra funds will increase the number of families who can be helped as well as the amount they can receive. Families will also benefit from additional services that will be provided by ACT, including budgeting classes and home weatherization kits.

The income eligibility limit for the ACT program is 200 percent of the federal poverty level – for example, \$32,184 a year for a family of three. HEAP serves people with incomes up to 175% of the poverty level or \$28,157 for family of three. Prior to this year, the income limit had been 150% of the poverty level.

In Hamilton County, an estimated 30,000 families could potentially be eligible for some amount of heating assistance ranging from a couple hundred dollars to \$1,000. The funds are paid directly to Cinergy or other energy providers.

Summary

New program providing up to \$1,000 in heating assistance for eligible families. Administered by ACT, 1005 Walnut Street. Call 721-8333 for appointment.

E-HEAP - Emergency heating program for eligible families with a disconnect notice. One-time payment of \$175. Administered by Community Action Agency, 1740 Langdon Farm Road, Roselawn. Call 569-1850 for appointment.

HEAP – Regular heating assistance program. Applications available at ACT, CAA, Job and Family Services, other social service agencies, libraries or by calling 1-800-282-0880.

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Temporary Heating Assistance Service Fact Sheet

Media: For more information, call Carol Gibbs, president of ACT, 515-4030

ACT will pay a one-time supplement to Cinergy on the qualifying family’s behalf, not to exceed \$1000, for December, January and February. The payment will be based on how much energy the family used last year, plus an increase. Families with a high number of unpaid utility bills must enroll in ACT’s budget education program.

Cinergy customers will be expected to pay a minimum of their budget billing or percentage income plan amount. In March, ACT will make a one-time payment for

families to eliminate increase from their total winter heating bills, up to a maximum of \$1,000.

Applicants will be offered energy conservation packages that include plastic window covering, a carbon monoxide detector and energy saving light bulbs. People Working Cooperatively will offer applicants a weekly energy conservation workshop.

Eligibility

Eligibility will be on a first-come-first-served basis with enrollment beginning Dec. 12.

Families must live in Hamilton County, have dependent children ages 18 or younger, and have income below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guideline.

Process to Register

Call 721-8333 to schedule an appointment.

Bring the following required items:

- most recent Cinergy bill
- employment pay stubs from the last 30 days
- proof of all children who live in the home (such as current school report card)

Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency E-HEAP

Media: For more information, Call Mason Gray, Director of Community Relations, Community Action Agency, at 569-1854.

Operates from Nov. 1, 2005 through March 31, 2006

Eligibility

Families must live in Hamilton County, have dependent children ages 18 or younger, and have income below 175% of the Federal Poverty Guideline (example: maximum of \$28,157.50 annually for family of three)

To qualify for emergency assistance, income-eligible households must have a disconnection notice and/or a ten-day-or-less supply of fuel oil.

Process to Register

Call 569-1850 to schedule an appointment.

Customers must bring:

- Proof of income, last 13 weeks (every household member)
- Picture I.D. for head of household
- Social Security cards
- Most recent gas and electric and/or fuel bill