Grants to help low-income customers pay heating bills announced for 2020-2021

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As Michiganders settle into the cold weather season, nine community service agencies are ready to help customers who fall behind on home energy bills.

The agencies were recently awarded $54.5 million in Michigan Energy Assistance Program (MEAP) grants, the Michigan Public Service Commission and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) announced today.

MEAP is funded by the Low Income Energy Assistance Fund (LIEAF), which raises money through a monthly surcharge assessed by participating utilities, this year set by the MPSC **at 91 cents**. Additional funding for MEAP grants is provided through the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

The grant recipients, the amount each received and their service areas are as follows:

- Barry County United Way: $150,000, Barry County.
- MDHHS Bureau of Community Action and Economic Opportunity: $6.39 million, statewide.
- Society of St. Vincent de Paul of the Archdiocese of Detroit: $4.356 million; multiple counties throughout Michigan.
- Superior Watershed Partnership: $2.46 million, 15 Upper Peninsula counties, and multiple northern-Lower Peninsula counties.
- The Heat and Warmth Fund: $7.069 million, statewide.
- The Salvation Army: $11.4 million, statewide.
- TrueNorth Community Services: $10.85 million, statewide.
- United Way for Southeastern Michigan: $6.575 million, statewide.
- United Way of Jackson County: $5.25 million, statewide.

Grant recipient agencies emphasize helping the lowest-income households that have the highest energy burden. More than 55,000 households in Michigan received MEAP assistance in the funding period that ended Sept. 30.

MEAP grant agencies also serve as MI Bridges navigators to help applicants with payments that can be used to meet home heating and electricity costs on primary residences. Assistance can cover full or partial payment of one or more bills for electric, natural gas, propane, heating oil, or any other deliverable fuel used to provide heat. Grant agencies will also provide energy self-sufficiency services, such as weatherization improvements, to reduce energy waste in homes.

Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, home energy bills are significant expenses for many household budgets. Help is available for customers having trouble paying their energy bills.

The MPSC urges customers to be proactive. Many utilities offer flexible payment plans. Contact your utility company or **propane supplier** as soon as you know you will be unable to pay your bill on time, and don't wait for a shutoff notice or put yourself in a situation where you might run out of fuel.

Here are ways to seek assistance:

- Call 211 or go to **www.mi211.org** to learn about agencies that may assist with your energy bill.
- State Emergency Relief may help low-income households pay part of their heating or electric bills, assist in keeping utilities in service, or have service restored, assistance that's available year round. Apply on **MI Bridges** or call your local **MDHHS office** for information. You'll be required to verify your income, so you may want to work with your utility or 211 first on tips to navigate this process. Households must apply for SER assistance prior to receiving any MEAP services.

Michiganders can take a number of steps to cut home energy costs by reducing energy waste and smarter use of energy.

- Check furnace filters and change them monthly or as recommended by the manufacturer. Clean filters allow furnaces to run more efficiently.
- Install a programmable thermostat and save on heating costs by lowering temperatures during daytime hours. Dressing for cold weather and turning down the thermostat another degree or two helps save money.
- Seal air leaks around windows, doors, or utility access points.
- Schedule a home energy assessment to identify ways to cut energy waste. Rebates on heating, ventilation and air conditioning, appliances, lighting, insulation and other improvements are available through utilities.
- Go to the MPSC's **Be Winterwise page** for more information, or check out additional recommendations on **reducing energy bills** from the U.S. Department of Energy.

*For more information about MEAP, visit the MPSC's **MEAP page**. For information about the MPSC, visit **www.Michigan.gov/MPSC**, sign up for its **monthly newsletter** or other **listservs**, or follow the Commission on **Twitter**.*

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