

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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At End of LIHEAP Season, Department of Human Services Encourages Pennsylvania Renters to Apply for Utility Assistance Through the New Emergency Rental Assistance Program

Harrisburg, PA – Today, Department of Human Services (DHS) Acting Secretary Meg Snead reminded Pennsylvanians that the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) season has ended, but assistance with utility bills remains available through the [Emergency Rental Assistance Program \(ERAP\)](#) to individuals and families who live in rental properties. A total of \$847 million has been distributed among Pennsylvania's 67 counties to help thousands of families maintain their housing and utility services and to sustain the rental and utility industries hit hard by the economic downturn. ERAP launched in March.

"LIHEAP is closed until November, but ERAP is a new utility assistance program available right now to Pennsylvanians who pay rent on a residential property and who are struggling to afford electricity, gas, water, sewer, trash removal and – in some cases -- other utility bills," Acting Secretary Snead said. "This program is deliberately designed to help people dig out of what may be some very deep holes after a global pandemic and economic crisis that none of us could have planned for. I encourage Pennsylvanians to apply for this assistance as soon as possible because limited funds are being distributed on a first-come, first-served basis."

With federal funds allocated through the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, the Wolf Administration built the ERAP in partnership with the General Assembly through Act 1 of 2021 to distribute about \$569 million to Pennsylvania households through partnerships with local leaders. An additional \$278 million in rental assistance was directly allocated to Pennsylvania's largest counties by the federal government.

About two-thirds of Pennsylvania counties have partnered with DHS to make ERAP applications available to their residents online at www.compass.state.pa.us. The remaining counties opted to accept applications from county residents through their own application process.

Residents of all counties can visit COMPASS for information on how to apply for ERAP, including residents of counties that have developed their own process. If a person tries to apply through COMPASS but indicates that they reside in one of the 22 counties with its own application, they will be provided with information about how to apply, including a link to the county application if available.

"This program is an investment in our long-term economic recovery and the health and well-being of our communities. Having a safe place to live and the security of a home is essential to good health," Acting Secretary Snead said. "The COVID-19 crisis will end, but if we allow the instability of the last 14 months to jeopardize housing for people in difficult financial circumstances, this could have catastrophic effects on the health and well-being of individuals and communities across Pennsylvania. As we approach the summer months, we do not want anyone to lose access to vital utilities that make our homes safe and habitable."

Households may be eligible for up to 12 months of assistance to cover past-due or future rental and/or utility payments. The amount of a household's monthly rent or utility bills does not

preclude eligibility, but the amount of ERAP assistance provided to a household is determined by program administrators at the county level.

Assistance can be provided to a tenant for future rental payments, and for unpaid rental or utility arrears that were accrued on or after March 13, 2020 on a residential rental property. Counties may choose to provide additional assistance to eligible households if funds remain available.

To qualify for assistance, a household must be responsible to pay rent on a residential property and meet each of the following criteria.

- One or more people within the household has qualified for unemployment benefits, had a decrease in income, had increased household costs, or experienced other financial hardship due directly or indirectly to the COVID-19 pandemic; AND
- One or more individuals in the household can show a risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability; AND
- The household has an income at or below 80 percent of area median income, which varies by county. [Income limits by county are available on the DHS website](#). Resources (like bank accounts and cars) are not relevant to ERAP eligibility.

Applicants will need to provide the following information: head of household's personal information; income information for all household members 18 and older; rental lease and amount owed; landlord's name and contact information. If applying for utility assistance, applicants must provide utility expenses and utility provider information.

ERAP will end when all funds have been expended.

DHS also encourages Pennsylvanians struggling to meet basic needs to apply for programs including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), cash assistance, Medical Assistance and other programs, any time at www.compass.state.pa.us.

During the season, Pennsylvanians can also apply at www.compass.state.pa.us for utility assistance through LIHEAP, which helps with home heating bills so low-income homeowners and renters can stay warm and safe during the winter months.

More than 312,000 households statewide during the 2019-20 LIHEAP season received an average benefit of \$284 and a collective total of nearly \$89 million in LIHEAP cash benefits. The annual LIHEAP season begins in November and usually ends in early April. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and increased need, DHS extended the 2020-21 LIHEAP season to April 30, 2021.

For more information assistance programs available to help Pennsylvanians, visit www.dhs.pa.gov.

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