



State Joins The Citizens Utility Board In Urging Low-Income Households To Take Advantage Of More Than \$100 Million

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CHICAGO—The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) today joined the Citizens Utility Board (CUB) in announcing upcoming events to help more Illinois utility customers who are struggling with the cost of utility bills during the COVID-19 pandemic. Under Governor Pritzker's leadership, the State of Illinois recently implemented a major expansion of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which combined with other household relief funding available, has created the \$275 million Help for Illinois Families program to assist those impacted most by COVID-19. With over \$100 million in funding still available through this program, the State of Illinois and consumer advocates at CUB are urging residents eligible for the program to take advantage and apply for Help for Illinois Families assistance today. The State and CUB are teaming up to host two free virtual events, in English and Spanish, to assist residents with applying for or learning about the programs. These events will provide an overview of the program, as well as a live question and answer session allowing residents to get their questions answered in real-time.

More information on how to register for free events can be found below. To ensure as many residents possible can attend the informational sessions, both events will also be streamed live on Facebook.

- March 11 at 6pm – English, Registration: <https://tinyurl.com/DCEO0311> or on Facebook live: [Facebook.com/CUBIllinois](https://www.facebook.com/CUBIllinois)
- March 15 at 6pm – Spanish, Registration: <http://bit.ly/FBliveDCEO-CUBSPA> or on Facebook live: [https://facebook.com/cubspanol](https://www.facebook.com/cubspanol)

"Under Governor Pritzker's leadership, we are proud to have helped over 160,000 households with LIHEAP, but more help remains available to those in need. Applicants can get assistance from Help Illinois Families, emergency assistance program, in as little as thirty days," said DCEO Deputy Director David Wortman of the Office of Community Assistance, administering LIHEAP. "That is why we are teaming up with CUB to conduct live events offering residents an opportunity to join in, ask questions, and seek out ongoing assistance offered by the state and 30 plus community action partners with applying for help on their utility bills."

Since the launch of Help for Illinois Families last year, the program has helped over 113,000 residents receive over \$100 million in benefits on utilities and other household bills. The \$275 million Help for Illinois Families initiative was created in partnership with the General Assembly to expand the program's eligibility requirements and increase access to the program. Namely, the Pritzker administration has worked to expand equity by increasing the income eligibility threshold to 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, making an additional 1 million residents eligible for the program. Additionally, the state has adjusted requirements to LIHEAP making the program accessible for undocumented families for the first time ever.

"During the pandemic, it is vitally important that we do everything we can to alert utility customers to their rights and their options when it comes to paying their utility bills. Help Illinois families has expanded programing and help is available to offset costs for utilities for individuals who need assistance because of the pandemic," said CUB Executive Director David Kolata. "We look forward to partnering with DCEO for this event to share valuable information on how customers can better afford their utility bills during this crisis."

The State of Illinois and partners at CUB are urging residents to take advantage of LIHEAP funds before the moratorium on utility shut-offs is set to end on March 31. In addition to utility billing relief, the Help for Illinois Families Initiative includes emergency assistance for rent, temporary shelter and other necessities. To make applying for these funds easy and accessible remotely, DCEO has taken steps to streamline the process, launching a new remote application, streamlined website, and expanded technical assistance available now in over 30 languages through the hotline 1-833-711-0374.

For more information on how to apply and to find out about relief programs available near you, please visit www.helpillinoisfamilies.com.