

Gov. Pritzker Announces \$42 Million Water Assistance Program For Low-Income Households

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CHICAGO —Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) today announced a new program available to assist low-income Illinois families experiencing economic hardship. A new water billing assistance program, the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP), provides \$42 million in shut-off avoidance for residents unable to pay their water and sewer bills.

The new water billing assistance program builds on \$327 million in emergency assistance launched earlier this year for low-income families facing difficulty with paying their utility bill and other essential household bills. Residents in need of financial support can visit www.helpillinoisfamilies.com for more information on how to apply for water and other assistance this season.

“Illinois is launching the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program – \$42 million to help residents keep up with their water and sewage bills, avoiding utility shut offs and ensuring the roof over their head is also a home,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Together with the \$327 million I announced in September for energy bill assistance and the Community Services Block Grant Program, our total available funds for utility bills and other household expenses are at a record level. We’ve been able to help Illinoisans avoid 112,000 utility disconnections across the state and will be providing hundreds of millions of additional dollars in the months ahead.”

LIHWAP recognizes the immense economic toll that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken on residents statewide. Households are finding it difficult to keep up with their utility bills, including water and sewer bills. For customers of the regulated water utilities, nearly 20% of households are paying late fees and five percent are shut off or in immediate danger of being shut off.

“Our administration knows that financial stress can come from many sides, and that’s why we have allocated hundreds of millions of dollars to not only rental and mortgage aid, like the \$505 million distributed to 57,000 households through the Illinois Rental Payment Program, but also utility assistance,” said Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton. “The Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program builds on these support systems and will bring relief to thousands more families. It is another lifeline for our most vulnerable residents.”

“Under Governor Pritzker's leadership, we are expanding our Help Illinois Families programs to include Water Assistance to help ensure Illinoisans have access to fundamental resources like water, regardless of their income," said Acting Director of DCEO Sylvia I. Garcia.

New LIHWAP funds are being made available to low-income families who are facing disconnection, those who have already been shut off, or those currently facing arrearages of \$250 or more.

LIHWAP was authorized in this year’s State budget, supported with funds via the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Consolidated Appropriations Act. Additionally, the Governor signed and state lawmakers passed two pieces of legislation, P.A. 102-0262 and P.A. 102-0613, authorizing two future permanent state-funded water

assistance programs that will grant families relief on arrearages and to help prevent more families from facing shutoffs.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Pritzker administration has directed a significant expansion of programs to in response to the needs facing families. This includes leveraging of an historic amount of assistance for rental and mortgage payments and directing a record-level of investment in the State's LIHEAP utility assistance program. Additionally, the State has created historic access to these programs, by expanding the income threshold to serve more low-income families, and by allowing undocumented families to qualify for LIHEAP for the first time in state history.

To date – more than \$470 million in household assistance has been made available as part of Help Illinois Families – and nearly 112,000 utility disconnections statewide have been avoided, thanks to State of Illinois interventions over the past year and half.

Families have several options when seeking water and utility assistance funds. Eligible applicants can visit DCEO's website helpillinoisfamilies.com to fill out a request for service form, can contact the hotline at 1-833-711-0374, or may visit any one of 34 Community Action Agencies located statewide.

“We are pleased to partner with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity on this critical initiative to establish water service as a basic human right and advance equity.” said Harold Rice, President and Chief Executive Officer of CEDA. “Our organization will be partnering with the State for low-income residents of Cook County to ensure high-quality services by leveraging our more than 55 years of operations, education, and engagement of local residents.”

Eligibility for LIHWAP, like LIHEAP and other household assistance programs offered by the state, is income dependent. To be eligible, Illinois families must demonstrate that they are within 200 percent of the federal poverty line. For a family of four, this means combined income of \$54,000 or less. To find out if you are eligible, please visit helpillinoisfamilies.com. LIHWAP applications will be accepted now through August 31, 2023 or until funds are exhausted.

"Thank you, Governor Pritzker, for taking the initiative to engage and create a program that's long overdue for the residents and citizens across the State of Illinois," said Bishop Dr. Claude Porter, founder of PLCCA. "This initiative demonstrates the kind of leadership he is capable of providing and his continued efforts to make a difference."

The latest emergency relief by the State of Illinois is provided through the Governor's Help Illinois Families initiative – aimed at helping low-income residents access utility and basic household assistance dollars provided via the Low-Income Household Energy

Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and CSBG. More than \$200 million in utility assistance remains available this season through LIHEAP alone.

To apply for these programs or water assistance, visit DCEO's website helpillinoisfamilies.com, or contact the hotline service providing real-time assistance in over 30 languages at 1-833-711-0374.