

**Conference Title: LIHEAP – The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program**

**Moderator: Teresa McDonnell**

**Presenter: Moira Foster**

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Teresa McDonnell: Good morning everyone. Thank you for joining us. My name is Teresa McDonnell. I am the Outreach Operations Manager with the Pennsylvania Enrollment Assistance Program. Welcome to the Pennsylvania Enrollment Services Webinar series. Today's Webinar is on LIHEAP, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. Thank you for attending.

Before we began, please know that the phones have been muted. If you have any questions please type them directly into the chat box at the bottom right-hand side of the screen and we'll answer them at the end of the presentation. This call is being recorded. The slides and other related materials will be posted on [www.enrollnow.net](http://www.enrollnow.net). The slides will also be available after the Webinar for download.

Now let's get started with the Webinar. Our presenter today is Moira Foster. Moira, is the LIHEAP Policy Supervisor for the Bureau of Policy within the Department of Human Services. She has been with the LIHEAP policy unit since May 2016. Prior to that Moira worked as an income maintenance caseworker for DHS. We are very happy she could join us today to educate us on this program and I will now turn it over to you Moira, thank you.

Moira Foster: Thank you, good morning, so we'll just go ahead and get started with this. As (Teri) said, any questions we'll take at the end. So if you just want to type those into the chat box we'll get to those. This is just going to be a quick overview of the 2019- 2020 LIHEAP program for the state of Pennsylvania. LIHEAP is the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. It's a federally funded block grant to help low income households afford home energy costs. Pennsylvania offers heating assistance and energy efficiency improvements with this grant. For the 2018-19 program year last year Pennsylvania received \$206.4 million through the LIHEAP block grant. Funding has

not been issued as far as this upcoming season so we anticipate similar funding but we're not sure what we're getting at this point.

The LIHEAP grant is split between two departments 85% of the grant is used by the Department of Human Services. DHS uses its portion to issue LIHEAP cash benefits to help with home heating bills or LIHEAP crises benefits for fuel supply emergencies. The LIHEAP cash and crisis programs are administered by the 67 county assistance offices throughout the state. The remaining 15% is used by the Department of Community and Economic Development, BCED. They use their portion for LIHEAP weatherization assistance and LIHEAP crisis benefits for inoperative heating systems. This is sometimes referred to as crisis weatherization or crisis interface. This is administered throughout the state by 36 weatherization agencies.

Some of the statistics from last year's season for LIHEAP cash there were 516,661 applicants for the LIHEAP cash program with 64% of the applications being approved. The average LIHEAP cash benefit the household received was \$276. DHS received 134,826 applications for LIHEAP crisis. That had an 80% approval rating and the average cash benefit was \$389. For the upcoming season it will officially open on November 1 of 2019 and will run through April 10 of 2020. This is for both the cash and the crisis programs. The crisis interface, crisis weatherization program will also open on November 1st. Any termination notices are accepted as proof for crisis before the start of the winter moratorium which starts on December 1 of 2019. So between November 1 and December 1 of 2019 termination notices will be accepted as proof for a crisis.

Here's the annual income limits for a LIHEAP program. It's based on household size. We use 150% of the federal poverty guideline. So these charts are of available on our Web site also on our brochure for quick reference to give a guideline as far as who might be eligible for the program. Some quick facts about the LIHEAP cash program it's used to help offset the winter heating cost. The grants range from a minimum of \$200 to a maximum of \$1000.

Cash benefit amounts are based on the household size, household income, fuel type and heating region. The heating region is determined by a formula that calculates which counties are the coldest to the warmest in a state based on the average temperature. There are five heating regions and they can be found in Appendix A above the LIHEAP state plan. In most of the cases for LIHEAP cash the benefit is sent directly to the participating utility provider or the vendor or the fuel vendor I'm sorry.

Also for the cash -- before I go on -- the benefit tables are available on our LIHEAP Web site through the [dhs.pa.gov](http://dhs.pa.gov) you'll find links to the LIHEAP Web site and that will give you the ability to search for a specific county and heating provider or heating type of heating and that will give you the benefit chart. So you'll be able to see what the benefit would be for each household size in each region. For the LIHEAP crisis program it's a benefit issued to the home - for home heating emergencies. These benefit amounts can range from \$25 to \$600. Households can receive multiple crisis issuances but cannot go over the \$600 for a LIHEAP season. No application is needed for the crisis program if the household has already been approved for LIHEAP cash.

The crisis benefit is issued in the amount needed to resolve the crisis up to \$600. For deliverable fuels such as oil and kerosene, propane, wood or coal the amount needed to resolve the crisis is based on whether the fuel is delivered by the vendor or transported by the applicant. If it's delivered the amount needed to resolve the crisis is the amount needed to fill the tank as much as possible with the funds available. For utility vendors the amount of a crisis grant cannot exceed the amount listed on the utility termination notice subject to the minimum and maximum crisis benefits allowed. And crisis benefits may be used for the reconnection fees as well.

A household can apply for LIHEAP through one of four means. They can apply online at [www.compass.state.pa.gov](http://www.compass.state.pa.gov). They can submit an application by mail to the local county assistance office, they can fax an application to the local county assistance office or they can drop in an application in person to the local county assistance office. We have started preseason

mailings those began on September 23 and those are for households who were previously approved for LIHEAP in the past season. We send either an application or a postcard with a registration number on it. And they can either go to the Web site and enter the registration information to gain access to the LIHEAP application online or they can submit the paper application to the assistance office. And this is just something that we offer only to people who received LIHEAP benefits the previous season and like I said before starting November 1st the season will be available to everyone.

This is the first page of the LIHEAP application. For preseason applicants at the top of the application you'll see that there's the COMPASS registration number that will allow the households to receive the paper application and submit it through COMPASS if they choose. This is a copy of the postcard that some households receive. Any household that submitted a COMPASS application previously is sent a postcard. It notifies them that they can apply for LIHEAP before the official start of the season and their COMPASS registration number is displayed on the reverse side of this postcard.

The benefit is to, the benefit to applying online is that information will be pre-populated based on what we already know about the household and makes the process quicker for the household to apply. The users are able to scan and upload their verification through their computer or through their myCOMPASS mobile app. This is the COMPASS Web site. This option is available beginning for preseason 9/21 for regular season November 1st. Those with registration numbers can apply through the link starting September 21st. The link is not available once the season closes. We take all of those links down to prevent people from believing that they're applying when the season is closed. So at this point the links are available and with a registration number they can access it without a registration number it won't be available until November 1st.

We also have a myCOMPASS PA mobile app. It offers a LIHEAP application only to the people who have applied previously for LIHEAP. We do not currently have the full application available

on the mobile app for people who are new to the LIHEAP program. This would be exclusively for preseason applications. This is available through the Apple Store and Google Play Store for most smartphones. The myCOMPASS PA app can also be used to check the status of applications or benefits. And households can complete semi-annual reporting and upload documents to myDHS. So this would be beneficial for them in other programs as well not just for LIHEAP but semi-annual reporting is for other benefits. Any of the documents they upload would be accessible for SNAP, cash, medical access; any of those programs.

So the process when an application is received is reviewed to determine if it's complete. The verification is requested from the application if needed and the applicant has 15 days to provide the required verification. The application will be approved or rejected within 30 days of receipt. The applicant receives a notice explaining the eligibility determination. If a household or an applicant has any questions they are able to contact the client hotline. The phone number is 1-866-857-7095.

They can also access the COMPASS Web site that has frequently asked questions. We also have the LIHEAP brochure available in English and Spanish. Our LIHEAP Web site has eligibility information and benefit tables as I described before. They also have the LIHEAP policy handbook available online. So if someone has a more in-depth question about eligibility and what's available that is out there as well as links to the LIHEAP state plan that Pennsylvania has submitted to the federal government to ensure our funding that explains the overview of the program and how it's being run in Pennsylvania.

We also have contact for vendors, utility companies, deliverable vendors. They have a help line that they can contact and an email address. And then also a vendor Web site that they can contact with any questions that they may have throughout this evening and to troubleshoot any issues they might have with payments or questions regarding crisis or how to payments things like that. Are there any questions?

Okay, it looks like we do have one question so far. "If an applicant has no current heating source in their home it was recently built and moved into could crisis services help them obtain a heating source such as a furnace or wall heaters?" Generally no, for the crisis interface program if a home is purchased without a heating system they do not provide heating systems at that point. There are a few exceptions to that. We are of the mind-set if in doubt go ahead and make a referral or request services that way the weatherization agency can look at the situation, determine if they would be eligible or not. But I will say generally if a home is bought without a heating system they are not eligible but, they are more than welcome to at least apply for those services and see if they are eligible.

The next question, "If you apply for cash grant to help electric can you use crisis for your fuel tank?" For that situation we would have the primary source of heat for - sorry questions skipped up on me let me go back and look at it. You would say that the primary source of heat would be the fuel that they're using and then electric would be their secondary. And we do allow the grants to be used in primary or secondary heating sources. So if someone elected to use their cash grant on their electric and then were in crisis with their deliverable fuel then yes they could receive those grants to separate vendors, that wouldn't be an issue.

The only time that becomes questionable is if someone is using a supplemental heating source. We only allow LIHEAP grants to be issued to the primary or the secondary; primary if the heating source used most by the home. secondary is only electricity if it's used for running the primary source. So any additional heating sources outside of that like from, you know, some people have a wood stove that heats one room in their house or something like that that would still be considered a supplemental and would not be eligible for benefits.

The next question, "Can LIHEAP help with disconnected services?" LIHEAP can help with disconnected services. We do allow 50% of the LIHEAP benefits to be issued to a previous asset.

So if the household had lived at a different address and they had a back bill background that was not allowing them to initiate service at their new residence we current issue up to five, 50% of the LIHEAP grants to the previous address balance. But if they haven't moved and they just have disconnected services at their home their current residence then absolutely that can be used for that purpose. The only caveat with the crisis funds is that we have to be able to resolve the crisis with those funds.

So if the termination notice or the amount needed to restore service is above the \$600 we would look to see if we can combine the cash in the crisis grant. If it's still above that amount we ask the utility provider if they're willing to accept less than what the termination notice is and generally they are willing to work with us on things like that or the household will need to come up with the remaining balance. And then everybody kind of pools the money together to resolve that crisis but we do have to be able to resolve the crisis in order to issue those funds.

The next question, "It's stated no applications needed the household is already approved for LIHEAP, but what if the application is not approved yet but the person is in crisis such a termination letter will the person be given a grant for help?" If a household applied for LIHEAP cash and the application has not yet been approved and then they receive a termination notice for - and are requesting crisis they can go ahead and call in, report that they have the crisis situation and we would work to process the cash and the crisis at the same time. So they would not need an additional application for the crisis they would just process the crisis at the same time as they're processing the cash application. Okay any other questions?

Teresa McDonnell: We'll give it another minute or two to see if there are additional questions.

Moira Foster: Okay, "How long does an approval take?" We provide a determination usually within 30 days. It could be faster than that. It could extend beyond that in some situations. When we receive an application it's reviewed to see if it's complete. If it is then it can be processed as soon

as the assistance office gets to it. Generally, if all the information is needed an application can be processed fairly quickly sometimes it takes a little bit longer if it's not, if the assistance office has the pend and sent a letter to the household requesting verification sometimes that can take a while. We give them 15 days to respond to that but we also have a larger window we can reconsider an application for up to 60 days.

So if a household doesn't turn their needed verification within the 15 day timeframe and the application is rejected for that reason but then the household provides that information we can go off of that same application and make a determination at that point. So sometimes it will take longer than the 30 days but generally 30 days is the most amount of time that we take to make a determination. Crisis benefits do have shorter time frames. Those we try to address if there's a life threatening issue. Those get addressed within 18 hours of the application being completed. Any others we try to resolve those with in the timeframe that the household will either be out of fuel or a shut off notice. So we try to eliminate the possibility of them being without heat. "Will the PowerPoint be available to print?"

Teresa McDonnell: Yes, and it will be available at the end of the presentation. And for those that have registered ahead of time in the reminder email it was also attached to the reminder email on the right-hand side under downloadable files.

Moira Foster: "If a person has a past due balance on an old account that has been attached to their current account can they request LIHEAP assistance or crisis assistance with this balance?" Yes, if it is a past due amount on the bill LIHEAP can be applied to that amount. They would only be able to apply for crisis if they were in danger of being shut off but the LIHEAP funds can be used towards the back balance.

Teresa McDonnell: Are there other questions for Moira? Okay, well if you have questions that did not get answered or for additional questions please email us at Teresa S McDonnell that's T-E-R-E-S-A,

S as in Sam, M-C-D-O-N-N-E-L-L@maximus.com and I will be sure to get those to Moira. Please take some time to give us your feedback by completing the Webinar survey at the end of this call. The email with the survey link will include a copy of the presentation today. It can be found on the right-hand side of the email under the heading downloadable files. Please download the file prior to taking the survey. For more information about upcoming Webinars please visit [www.enrollnow.net](http://www.enrollnow.net) under meetings and news. Thank you again for your participation today. Thank you Moira for joining us to talk with us about LIHEAP and everyone please have a great day.

Moira Foster: Thank you.

Teresa McDonnell: Thank you.