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**News Release: Minnesota receives $102 million in federal funds for Energy Assistance Program**

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 October 23, 2017 |
| **Minnesota receives $102 million in federal funds for Energy Assistance Program****Low-income Minnesotans encouraged to apply for heating assistance****For Immediate Release**Minnesota Commerce Commissioner Mike Rothman announced that the state’s Energy Assistance Program is receiving over $102 million ($102,230,040) in federal funding to help low-income Minnesotans pay their heating bills this winter. The funds from the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) are used to reduce home heating costs by making grant payments directly to utility companies and heating fuel vendors on behalf of eligible Minnesota homeowners and renters. The new funding, which is at the same level as last year, is about 90 percent of the total federal funds expected for the state’s program this heating season.“Year after year, Minnesota’s Energy Assistance Program has helped needy families with their heating bills during the winter,” said Rothman, whose agency administers the program. “These federal funds provide an essential safety net to protect vulnerable Minnesotans from losing heat during the coldest months of the year. As temperatures drop and heating bills rise, we want Minnesotans to know that help is available from the state’s Energy Assistance Program.”Rothman noted that the U.S. Department of Energy expects that heating costs will rise this winter as a result of colder temperatures and higher energy prices, especially for heating oil, propane and natural gas. Even modest increases in heating use and energy prices can be a financial challenge for low-income households. The Minnesota Commerce Department administers the Energy Assistance Program in partnership with 30 local service providers throughout the state. It is funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The program helps homeowners and renters who earn less than 50 percent of the state’s median income (for example, an annual income of $48,077 for a household of four) obtain grant money to help pay their heating bills.The program served over 126,000 Minnesota households last year, with an average grant of about $520. Some of these households also received help to address no-heat crisis situations and repair broken heating systems. **How to apply for heating assistance**Local service providers have reviewed thousands of applications for energy assistance already this fall, and payments for many who qualified will begin as early as this week.There is still plenty of time for new applicants and for those who qualified last year to reapply, but funding is limited and administered on a first-come, first-served basis. Applications will be taken until May 31, 2018, or until funds run out.Qualifying households must apply for assistance with the local service provider in their area. To get more information about the program and contact their local service provider, Minnesotans can call 800-657-3710 or visit the [Energy Assistance section](https://mn.gov/commerce/consumers/consumer-assistance/energy-assistance/) of the Commerce Department website.**Cold Weather Rule Protection**In addition to applying for heating assistance, low-income Minnesotans are encouraged to contact their utility and seek protection under the state’s Cold Weather Rule. The Cold Weather Rule, in effect from Oct. 15 to April 15, protects residential utility customers from having their heat shut off.Customers must contact their utility to establish and maintain a monthly payment plan. Households that need to reconnect for winter should contact their utility now to take advantage of the payment options.Minnesotans who use delivered fuels such as propane, fuel oil or wood to heat their homes are not covered by the Cold Weather Rule, but they are eligible for financial help from the Energy Assistance Program.More information on shut-off protection and the Cold Weather Rule is available at the [Minnesota Public Utilities Commission website](https://mn.gov/puc/consumers/help/shut-off-protection/) or by calling 651-296-0406 or 800-657-3782.**Media Contact**Ross CorsonDirector of Communications[Minnesota Department of Commerce](http://mn.gov/commerce)p: 651-539-1463 | c: 651-368-5050 | ross.corson@state.mn.us |

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