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**Governor Phil Murphy**

# ICYMI: DCA Notifies Households with Overdue Electric and Natural Gas Bills that Utility Relief Is Available

10/12/2021

*Letters Mailed Out Today to Approximately 350,000 Households Eligible for Assistance;  
DCA Urges Households that Receive a Letter to Immediately Apply for Help*

**TRENTON** – The New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA) today mailed out letters to approximately 350,000 households with overdue electric and natural gas bills to notify them that they are potentially eligible for assistance to pay their utility arrearages. The Department urges people who receive a letter to act quickly and immediately apply for help since the assistance is available for a limited time only.

“If you or a loved one receives a letter from the Department of Community Affairs about utility relief, please understand that the letter is official and legitimate. Do not throw it away or toss it aside. We encourage you to follow the instructions on the letter and apply as soon as you can for help with your overdue electric and gas bills,” **said Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver, who serves as DCA Commissioner.** “The pandemic has been hard on so many people and forced families to choose between essential expenses like housing, food, medicine, and utilities. If you weren’t able to pay one or more utility bills, assistance is available to cover most, if not all, of what you owe.”

“With the grace period for paying overdue utility bills set to expire on December 31, I urge anyone who is eligible for utility assistance to apply for these programs,” **said Joseph L. Fiordaliso, President, New Jersey Board of Public Utilities.** “We are extremely empathetic towards those who have been deeply impacted by COVID and unable to pay their utility bill. Recognizing this, the Board expanded eligibility for the Universal Service Fund and Fresh Start Programs to ensure more New Jerseyans have access to the help they need.”

The letters mailed out today contain a QR code that households can scan with their smartphone to access a State website to apply for utility relief. The letter also includes a web address and toll-free phone number for those households that don’t have a smartphone or internet.

Households will have one month from the time they receive the letter to complete the application form and certify that a COVID-related hardship affected their ability to pay for electric and/or gas bills. If found eligible, households will receive credits on their utility accounts.

Approximately \$375 million in federal funding has been allocated for utility arrearages. Sixty percent of the allocation is coming from legislation (S-3691) Governor Murphy signed into law on August 4, 2021. The remainder is from Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding set aside specifically for utility arrears.

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For those households that are current on their utility bills, but are still in need of assistance, the LIHEAP and New Jersey Universal Service Fund (USF) program application period opened on October 1, 2021. New Jersey residents can apply online by visiting <https://njdca-housing.dynamics365portals.us/en-US/dcaid-services/> (<https://njdca-housing.dynamics365portals.us/en-US/dcaid-services/>). To find out if they're eligible for this assistance, people can use the completely anonymous online screening tool called DCAid by visiting [nj.gov/dca/dcaid](http://nj.gov/dca/dcaid) ([nj.gov/dca/dcaid](http://nj.gov/dca/dcaid)).

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is a federal program that helps households at or below 60 percent of the state median income (\$6,439 a month for a family of four) pay for energy costs (electric, gas, deliverable fuels and those included in rent). The Universal Service Fund (USF) program provides a monthly credit on electric and gas bills for households at or below 400 percent of the federal poverty level (\$8,833 a month for a family of four).

Also, the Lifeline Utility Assistance Program, which is administered by the New Jersey Department of Human Services, provides an annual \$225 grant for electric and gas costs to seniors and the disabled. The grant appears as a credit on a utility bill or is included in a recipient's Supplemental Security Income check. Income limits for this program are set at less than \$28,769 for a single person or at \$35,270 if married.

DCA offers a wide range of programs and services, including local government management and finance, affordable housing production, fire safety, building safety, community planning and development, and disaster recovery and mitigation.

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