

Governor Phil Murphy

ICYMI: DCA Reminds New Jersey Residents Impacted by Delay in Federal SNAP Benefits of Available Utility Assistance and Shutoff Protections

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TRENTON — The New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA) is announcing that individuals and families who have been affected by delays in federal SNAP benefits may be eligible for utility assistance and shutoff protections under the State's Winter Termination Program (WTP) and other DCA-administered resources.

The [Winter Termination Program](https://www.nj.gov/dca/dhcr/offices/wintertermination.shtml) (<https://www.nj.gov/dca/dhcr/offices/wintertermination.shtml>) protects residential customers from disconnection of natural gas, electric, water, and sewer services between November 15 and March 15. New Jersey residents who rely on SNAP benefits and have been impacted by the delay in federal funding may qualify for these protections if they are able to demonstrate an inability to pay their utilities due to circumstances beyond their control.

"Over the last few weeks, hundreds of thousands of New Jerseyans have been impacted by the reckless federal decision to not issue SNAP benefits fully and on-time," **said Governor Murphy**. "As the weather gets colder and we continue to face an energy affordability crisis, our Department of Community Affairs continues to offer several programs to protect vulnerable residents from utility shutoffs. We encourage all SNAP recipients who are having difficulty paying their utilities as a result of the federal disruption of benefits to confirm their eligibility and participate in our Winter Termination Program to ensure their families are warm and safe this holiday season."

Other eligible participants include customers enrolled in programs such as the Universal Service Fund (USF), Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Lifeline, Pharmaceutical Assistance to the Aged and Disabled (PAAD), Work First New Jersey/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is a federally funded program that helps low- and moderate-income households pay for heating costs, regardless of fuel type. Even if heating is included in rent, tenants may qualify. Grants are also available for medically necessary cooling costs. Applications are accepted October 1 through June 30, while funds last.

"Even modest changes to federal programs can ripple through household budgets and put essential utilities at risk," **said DCA Commissioner Jacquelyn A. Suárez**. "We want New Jersey families to know that help is available. Whether you're struggling to keep up with energy costs or facing unexpected hardship, our utility assistance programs are

designed to protect you through the winter months and beyond.”

“For more than two decades, the Winter Termination Program has been a critical safety net for New Jersey families during the most challenging months of the year,” **said New Jersey Board of Public Utilities President Christine Guhl-Sadovy**. “This program reflects our commitment to ensuring that no New Jersey resident has to choose between paying their utility bills and meeting other essential needs during the winter months. We encourage all eligible residents, including SNAP recipients, to contact their utility providers today to secure this vital protection.”

How to Enroll

To receive Winter Termination Program protection, eligible residents must contact their utility company directly and notify them of their qualification. This can be done verbally or by submitting a self-certification form for eligible customers receiving residential electric, sewer and water service from a local authority, municipal utility, or rural electric cooperative. Documentation of enrollment in a qualifying assistance program may be requested. The form will automatically be sent to the selected utility company.

Access the Winter Termination Program Self-Certification Form

(https://www.nj.gov/dca/divisions/dhcr/forms/docs/Self_Cert_for_WTP.pdf)

Households can apply for assistance for LIHEAP/Universal Service Fund by visiting DCAid at

<https://dcaid.dca.nj.gov/en-US/> (<https://dcaid.dca.nj.gov/en-US/>).

Additional Programs

In addition to WTP and LIHEAP, several programs administered or supported by DCA offer ongoing help with utility costs:

UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUND (USF) AND FRESH START PROGRAM

Provides monthly credits on electric and natural gas bills for income-eligible customers. The Fresh Start component offers forgiveness on overdue balances for qualifying USF participants. USF is administered by DCA; Fresh Start is administered by gas and electric utilities in partnership with BPU.

LIFELINE PROGRAM

Offers annual benefits to eligible low-income seniors and individuals with disabilities to help with electric and natural gas costs. Applications can be completed online at www.aging.nj.gov (<https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/doas/>) or by calling 1-800-792-9745.

PAGE (Payment Assistance for Gas and Electric)

Provides grants to help customers prevent disconnection or restore utility service. Households should apply for LIHEAP or USF first, then apply for PAGE if additional support is needed. Apply online at www.sharesnation.org (<https://sharesnation.org/>) or call 866-657-4273.

NJ SHARES

A nonprofit that assists income-eligible households in paying for energy, telephone, broadband, water, and wastewater bills. More information is available at www.sharesnation.org (<https://sharesnation.org/>) or by calling 866-657-4273.

"New Jersey families shouldn't have to choose between putting food on the table and keeping the lights on," **Commissioner Suárez added.** "We encourage anyone struggling this winter to reach out and take advantage of these safety nets."

For additional information about energy assistance and utility protections, visit <https://www.nj.gov/dca/divisions/dhcr/> (<https://www.nj.gov/dca/dhcr/index.shtml>).

The Division of Housing and Community Resources is committed to strengthening neighborhoods through the delivery of affordable housing and supportive services and to providing financial and technical assistance to municipalities, community action agencies, and other nonprofit organizations for community and economic development projects that improve the quality of life for residents, especially those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged.

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, disaster recovery and mitigation, and information privacy.

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