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# Connecticut's moratorium on utility shutoffs ended. Here's where you can still get help.

4-5 minutes

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For Lee Carenza, the state moratorium on utilities shutoffs was important for as long as it lasted, helping people who lost their jobs or were furloughed.

“It got them through to where people are back to work for the most part and able to meet their needs,” said Carenza, director of community services for Thames Valley Council for Community Action (TVCCA).

While Connecticut’s yearly winter utility shutoff moratorium is coming Nov. 1, the state ended its pandemic-related utility shutoff moratoriums on Sept. 15, and groups that supply heating assistance have seen an increase in demand from clients.

Carenza said his organization has taken in over 2,155 applications since Aug. 1, where they’d normally see 1,700 applications by this time.

Lee-Ann Gomes, Norwich Human Services director, said

she's been seeing an increased demand for utility assistance, and her department has given out \$23,000 in assistance since Nov. 2020.

## **Applications now accepted for energy assistance**

The Connecticut Energy Assistance Program, which is the largest program available in New London County, started taking applications on Aug. 1. That's "exciting," Carenza said, given the expiration of the statewide moratorium.

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As a result, TVCCA is “fully up and running” in terms of accepting applications.

Carenza called the Assistance Program “very generous,” as it provides assistance for families of four with household incomes as high as \$75,052, and can address a variety of different heating sources.

Carenza said TVCCA has had a good working relationship with the energy providers, including the local utilities and Eversource “to protect families through the winter.”

Chris Riley, spokesperson for Norwich Public Utilities (NPU), said the company has been understanding with people's ability to pay the bills, including using special payment agreements to spread out back payments on each monthly

bill to May 2023. As of Friday, there are agreements with 1,141 customers. Those include 22 commercial customers with a collective balance of \$548,854, and 1,119 residential customers with a collective balance of \$1.57 million.

As well, he said nearly \$100,000 has been awarded so far from UniteCT to NPU customers to help in paying electric bills. Riley said the company always views termination as a “last resort.”

Carenza noted an increase in the award levels and said the department of social services added flexibility to make it easier to qualify, including those benefiting from DSS Cash Programs, Supplemental Security Income, Temporary Financial Assistance, SSI Refugee Cash and SNAP Recipients.

In a normal year, Carenza expects TVCCA to receive 8,200 applications, but said he expects to exceed that “by quite a bit,” this year, in part because there is a statewide push.

In Norwich, Gomes' department is about to receive \$75,000 from American Rescue Plan funds to continue providing utility assistance. She’s hoping the need for assistance decreases, with jobs and the economy coming back.

However, she also said some people may not be aware of what resources the city has for them, from utility assistance, to rent, broadband and childcare assistance.

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“We’re going to advertise the fact that, with this American Rescue Plan money, we have the ability to help people, and we want anyone who is still behind on their utility bills or are unable to pay, to come to us to see if we can help,” Gomes said.

Find information on assistance available, and how to apply at <https://www.tvcca.org/>, <https://accessagency.org/> for Windham County residents, or <https://www.norwichct.org/212/Human-Services> for Norwich residents.