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# Pa. residents encouraged to apply for utility help

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HARRISBURG — The Acting Secretary of the Department of Human Services, Meg Snead, has reminded Pennsylvanians that the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program season has ended, but assistance with utility bills remains available through the Emergency Rental Assistance Program to individuals and families who live in rental properties.

A total of \$847 million has been distributed among Pennsylvania's 67 counties to help thousands of families maintain their housing and utility services and to sustain the rental and utility industries hit hard by the economic downturn. ERAP launched in March.

“LIHEAP is closed until November, but ERAP is a new utility assistance program available right now to Pennsylvanians who pay rent on a residential property and who are struggling to afford electricity, gas, water,

sewer, trash removal and — in some cases — other utility bills,” Snead said. “This program is deliberately designed to help people dig out of what may be some very deep holes after a global pandemic and economic crisis that none of us could have planned for. I encourage Pennsylvanians to apply for this assistance as soon as possible because limited funds are being distributed on a first-come, first-served basis.”

With federal funds allocated through the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, the Wolf Administration built the ERAP in partnership with the General Assembly through Act 1 of 2021 to distribute about \$569 million to Pennsylvania households through partnerships with local leaders. An additional \$278 million in rental assistance was directly allocated to Pennsylvania’s largest counties by the federal government.

About two-thirds of Pennsylvania counties have partnered with DHS to make ERAP applications available to their residents online at [www.compass.state.pa.us](http://www.compass.state.pa.us). The remaining counties opted to accept applications from county residents through their own application process.

Residents of all counties can visit COMPASS for

information on how to apply for ERAP, including residents of counties that have developed their own process. If a person tries to apply through COMPASS but indicates that they reside in one of the 22 counties with its own application, they will be provided with information about how to apply, including a link to the county application if available.

Households may be eligible for up to 12 months of assistance to cover past-due or future rental and/or utility payments. The amount of a household's monthly rent or utility bills does not preclude eligibility, but the amount of ERAP assistance provided to a household is determined by program administrators at the county level.

Assistance can be provided to a tenant for future rental payments, and for unpaid rental or utility arrears that were accrued on or after March 13, 2020, on a residential rental property. Counties may choose to provide additional assistance to eligible households if funds remain available.

To qualify for assistance, a household must be responsible to pay rent on a residential property and meet each of the following criteria:

ö One or more people within the household has qualified for unemployment benefits, had a decrease in income, had increased household costs or experienced other financial hardship due directly or indirectly to the COVID-19 pandemic; AND

ö One or more individuals in the household can show a risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability; AND

ö The household has an income at or below 80% of area median income, which varies by county. Income limits by county are available on the DHS website. Resources, such as bank accounts and cars, are not relevant to ERAP eligibility.

Applicants will need to provide the following information: head of household's personal information; income information for all household members 18 and older; rental lease and amount owed; landlord's name and contact information. If applying for utility assistance, applicants must provide utility expenses and utility provider information.

ERAP will end when all funds have been expended.

DHS also encourages Pennsylvanians struggling to meet basic needs to apply for programs including the

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, cash assistance, Medical Assistance and other programs, any time at [www.compass.state.pa.us](http://www.compass.state.pa.us).

For more information assistance programs available to help Pennsylvanians, visit [www.dhs.pa.gov](http://www.dhs.pa.gov).

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