



NEWS

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State to ease energy costs with awards of \$2.4 million in federal funds

Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs to administer funds to help with utility bill payments, help households control energy consumption

(AUSTIN) — Thousands of low income Texans stand to better manage their energy costs this winter and have a safe, healthy home as the result of today's announcement from the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) that the state is receiving \$2.4 million in supplemental federal energy assistance funds.

The funds are in addition to the \$60 million in energy assistance grants TDHCA administers annually through the Community Affairs Division and its Comprehensive Energy Assistance Program (CEAP). The program helps low income Texans pay a portion of their utility bills and provides case management and consumer education to help eligible households achieve self-sufficiency. In 2006, TDHCA assisted nearly 97,000 households through CEAP.

"We're grateful for these additional funds that will no doubt help many more low-income Texans with their energy costs," said Michael Gerber, TDHCA Executive Director. "Low income households spend a far greater percentage of income on energy costs, and adequately cooling or heating a home can be a serious challenge. This is particularly true for elderly persons and for persons with disabilities. This additional funding will help us make a significant, positive impact on the lives of our most vulnerable neighbors."

Gerber explained that today's award was part of \$131 million in Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) grants released last week to each state by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. TDHCA will administer the funds through its network of 50 contract organizations providing direct service to income eligible individuals and families in all 254 Texas counties.

LIHEAP funds are designed to assist low income households in meeting their immediate energy needs and to encourage consumers to control energy costs through energy education. In addition, TDHCA also uses 15 percent of its LIHEAP allocation to help fund a program that helps weatherize the homes of low income Texans. Making a home more energy efficient helps save money on utility bills for other expenses such as rent, prescription medicine, and food.

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CEAP funds are targeted to serve households at or below 125 percent of federal poverty guidelines, which equals an annual income of \$20,650 for a family of four. Households must also demonstrate a need for assistance through the application process, and application intake is handled by contract service providers at the local level.

To find the nearest CEAP provider, use a land-based (non-cell phone) telephone and call 1-877-399-8939. Callers will be automatically routed to the CEAP provider serving their county. For more information on this and other energy assistance programs at TDHCA, visit the Department's website at www.tdhca.state.tx.us.

About the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs

The Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs is Texas' lead agency responsible for affordable housing, community services, energy assistance, and colonia housing programs. The Department annually administers more than \$400 million through for-profit, non-profit, and local government partnerships to deliver local housing and community-based opportunities and assistance to Texans in need.