



On March 2, 2022, the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) opened for applications. The program will provide financial assistance to low-income households to reduce the balances they have on their residential water and wastewater bills. Assistance is also available to customers to pay off balances on their residential gas and electric bills through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Universal Service Fund (USF) program.

Together, these programs will provide needed assistance to families struggling to meet basic needs for heat, power, water, and sewer, and will be critical to helping New Jersey residents get back on their feet as COVID-19 moves into an endemic phase.

To ensure that residents suffering financial hardship do not lose access to essential services when the water and sewer moratoriums established by P.L. 2021, c. 317 and the gas and electric Winter Termination Program end on March 15, the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA), Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and Board of Public Utilities (BPU) are asking that every utility, private or public, including those operated by our municipal governments, refrain from disconnecting service, or enforcing liens for non-payment, for customers who have applications for assistance pending.

DCA will make available to every utility on a bi-weekly basis a list of all the utility's customers who have LIHWAP, LIHEAP, or USF applications pending. Each utility is asked to inform Program Manager Fidel Ekhelar at [fidel.ekhelar@dca.nj.gov](mailto:fidel.ekhelar@dca.nj.gov) of an appropriate contact person (name, email, phone number) to receive the list.

DCA, DEP, and BPU also call upon all water systems that have not yet done so to execute vendor agreements for the LIHWAP program so that eligible customers may receive assistance in paying off their water and wastewater arrearages, and so that the utilities may benefit from receiving these federal funds. Please contact Fidel Ekhelar at [fidel.ekhelar@dca.nj.gov](mailto:fidel.ekhelar@dca.nj.gov) to execute the agreement or with any questions.

We encourage you provide information on the various utility assistance programs to all customers. More information can be found at: [Application Period Now Open for Low Income Household Water Assistance Program](#). The portal for submitting an application for utility assistance can be found at: [DCAid Services - Custom Portal](#).

P.L. 2021, c. 97 requires all local governments providing water, sewer, and electric service to notify residential customers of available ratepayer relief measures including LIHWAP. A model notice informing residential ratepayers of LIHWAP is available at:

[https://www.nj.gov/dca/divisions/dlgs/resources/misc\\_docs/Model%20COVID-19%20Ratepayer%20Relief%20Notice.docx](https://www.nj.gov/dca/divisions/dlgs/resources/misc_docs/Model%20COVID-19%20Ratepayer%20Relief%20Notice.docx). P.L. 2021, c. 317 also obligates local governments

to offer residential ratepayers installment plans for arrearages accruing between March 9, 2020 and March 15, 2022. For residential customers accepted into LIHWAP, local governments may also need to offer installment plans on arrearages accruing after March 15, 2022. Please review Local Finance Notice 2022-09, available at:

<https://www.nj.gov/dca/divisions/dlgs/lfns/22/2022-09.pdf>, for additional information on LIHWAP, installment plans, and residential ratepayer notices.

The Murphy Administration is deeply grateful for all that our utility providers have done to serve their customers and the residents of this state throughout the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 public health emergency.