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CEDA to Receive Millions in Emergency Funding to Help Families Keep Homes Heated During Winter Season

Additional funds will help to protect more seniors, disabled from dangers of cold winter

CHICAGO – (Oct. 10, 2008) – Concerned about rising energy costs this winter, more than 75,000 households throughout Cook County have applied for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) just over a month after the priority enrollment period began.

In response to the nationwide energy crisis, the federal government announced it plans to allocate \$5.5 billion in 2009 LIHEAP funding, doubling the funds from last year. In addition, the White House has released \$121 million in emergency relief funds to help low-income families cope with record home heating bills expected this winter. Administration officials said \$96 million would be distributed nationwide.

“We know that rising heating and energy costs have become a great financial detriment to thousands of families, but what we’re witnessing with LIHEAP is also the result of varying economic factors that impact the lives of everyday Americans, such as job loss and the burdens of managing basic cost-of-living expenses,” said CEDA President and CEO Robert L. Wharton. “We’re glad the Administration has acted responsibly by providing the state with additional funding, which will enable us to expand the reach of our program.”

The influx of applications during the program’s priority enrollment period, intended for seniors and persons living with disabilities, is up 20 percent from the same time period last year. CEDA is the state’s largest administrator of LIHEAP, a federal-and-state-funded program, and partners with ComEd on hardship programs to provide energy bill payment relief to low-income families. Seniors and persons living with disabilities make up 63 percent of all LIHEAP applicants statewide and are given priority enrollment partly due to the fragility of health issues that make them more susceptible to weather-related illnesses.

“We’ve seen the effect that harsh winters in Chicago have on the elderly and the disabled,” said Wharton. “LIHEAP really works as a safety net for people, particularly those on fixed incomes like seniors, who have no alternative source of income to help pay high energy bills so that their homes remain heated. It’s critically important to their overall health and well being.”

This year, Illinois has helped approximately 326,000 of the 982,000, or 33 percent, eligible households with summer and winter energy assistance through LIHEAP, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). CEDA, which serves many blighted communities like Robbins and Ford Heights, has handled more than 61 percent of this year's application requests. Due to an appropriations formula based on poverty levels per capita, Cook County receives the bulk of the state's funding. Between 2006 and 2008, CEDA served an average of 200,000 LIHEAP applicants annually.

"People have a heightened sense of alarm right now," added Wharton. "When the thought of adverse weather conditions such as extreme cold are compounded by the possibility of not being able to afford higher than normal heating bills, there's reason for concern. We have to make sure we're doing our part to help those that are most at risk of truly being affected this winter."

Eligibility for LIHEAP is based upon gross income for the 30 days prior to the date of application and is \$1,300 for one person household; \$1,750 for two person households; \$2,200 for three person households; and \$2,650 for four person households. In addition, any eligible household that is disconnected from their utility or who is at or below 25 percent on a delivered fuel and cannot get a delivery of their own may qualify for re-connection assistance.

On October 1, CEDA's LIHEAP Furnace program began accepting enrollment for applicants with disabilities, persons over the age of 60 and households that have disconnections. The program performs work on non-operable heating systems for homeowners and landlords living at the property in which the furnace is not working or has been red tagged by a utility company. General enrollment for all low-income households begins Nov. 1, 2008.

For more information on LIHEAP eligibility or to find local intake centers contact the toll free number at (800) 571-CEDA (2332) or visit www.cedaorg.net.

CEDA is one of the nation's largest non-profit organizations that serves more than 375,000 individuals annually and operates over 40 programs throughout Cook County in the areas of education, housing, economic development, family and children services, health and nutrition, and several others.

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