

The Low Income Household Water [*and Wastewater*] Assistance Program (LIHWAP)



PULP
PENNSYLVANIA
UTILITY LAW PROJECT

About PULP:

Mission:

Assist Pennsylvania's low income families to connect and maintain safe and affordable utility services to their home.

- Legal Representation
- Policy
- Advocacy
- Education
- Outreach
- Technical Assistance



LIHWAP: Overview

- Funded by Consolidated Appropriations Act and American Rescue Plan
 - **\$500 million** appropriated by federal government to the states.
 - Pennsylvania received **\$43.25 million**.
- Administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services
- Federal oversight by the Department of Health and Human Services

LIHWAP: Overview

- **Opened January 4, 2022**
- Individuals can apply at local County Assistance Office or through Compass
 - <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Assistance/Pages/LIHWAP.aspx>
 - Paper applications available online, can be dropped off or sent to CAO.
- Program Goal: **Reconnect Service and Prevent Termination**
 - *This is a temporary crisis program, not an ongoing water/ww affordability program.*
 - Additional programming being considered as part of federal spending packages to address long-term affordability

LIHWAP: Benefits

\$25 - \$2,500 Grant

- Grant must either prevent termination or facilitate reconnection.
- One grant per household, up to maximum \$2,500, for each service (water and wastewater).
- Consumers with separate water/ww providers may apply for a grant for *each provider*.
- Grants may cover past due water, wastewater, or stormwater fees.

LIHWAP: Eligibility

(1) Income at/below 150% Federal Poverty Level

| 2021 Federal Poverty Level Guidelines | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Household Members | 150% FPL |
| 1 | \$19,320 |
| 2 | \$26,130 |
| 3 | \$32,940 |
| 4 | \$39,750 |
| 5 | \$46,560 |

LIHWAP: Eligibility

(2) Household Water/Wastewater Responsibility

- HHDs in individually metered buildings that are responsible for paying the water/wastewater bill will be eligible for LIHWAP, **even if the bill is in the landlord or property owner's name.**
 - **Payment go directly to the water/ww utility to resolve outstanding debt and cannot be paid directly to the applicant or the landlord.*
- HHDs whose water bill is paid as an undesignated part of rent will not be eligible for LIHWAP.
 - **Emergency Rental (and Utility) Assistance available for these households*

LIHWAP: Eligibility

(3) Household at Risk of Termination / Service Already Off

- Households must have existing water arrearages.
 - **Note: Debts may be in the landlord's name, provided there is proof that the applicant is responsible for paying.*
- Termination notice not required.

LIHWAP: Eligibility

(4) Vendor must agree to maintain service for a minimum 90 days, even if arrearage amount exceeds available LIHWAP benefit.

- *If the vendor does not agree to accept available LIHWAP benefit to stop termination or facilitate reconnection, no grant will be authorized*

LIHWAP: Application Process

- Applications can be submitted to the county assistance office (CAO) online, by mail, in person, or by fax.
- After an application is received:
 - The application is reviewed to determine if it is complete.
 - Verification is requested from the applicant, if needed.
 - The applicant has 15 days to provide the verification.
 - The application is approved or rejected within 30 days of receipt.
 - The applicant receives a notice explaining the eligibility decision.
- ***We encourage water and wastewater utilities to place a hold on pending terminations for 30 days after a consumer submits an application to allow the application to process, and to prevent the accrual of avoidable fees.***

LIHWAP: Vendor Agreements

- Outreach to utilities with the LIHWAP Vendor Agreement began in October
 - Utilities can contact the LIHWAP Vendor Support Unit directly to request a copy by phone at 877-537-9517 or email RA-LIHWAPVENDORS@pa.gov
- Key items participating vendors agree to:
 - Provide customer's account history and account balance to DHS
 - Restore service within 48 hours of notification of LIHWAP approval (72 hours if digging required, 24 hours if life threatening situation)
 - Immediately apply the LIHWAP payment to a customer's past due bill, deposit, reconnect requirements, or arrearages to eliminate or reduce the amount owed by the customer.
 - Retain service for at least 90 days from acceptance of payment.

LIHWAP: Vendor Agreements

- **Key items participating Vendors agree to:**
 - Help LIHWAP customers enroll in payment agreements or other utility-administered programs they may be eligible for.
 - Not discriminate against customers who receive LIHWAP assistance.
 - Not apply LIHWAP payments to account balances that have previously been written off or paid with other funds.
 - Not apply LIHWAP payments to commercial accounts.
- **Key items DHS agrees to:**
 - Contact vendors for information about customer accounts
 - Send payments to vendors on behalf of the eligible households via Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Treasury checks or via direct deposit
 - Send lists of customers who receive a LIHWAP grant to the vendor.
 - Notify customer and vendors of the customer's eligibility and total benefit amount.

Helpful Resources

- DHS LIHWAP Website:
 - <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Assistance/Pages/LIHWAP.aspx>
- LIHWAP Vendor Support Unit (for water providers only)
 - 877-537-9517
 - RA-LIHWAPVENDORS@pa.gov

QUESTIONS?

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