

**STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION**

IN RE: LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE :
PROGRAM (LIHEAP) ENHANCEMENT CHARGE – 2022 : **DOCKET NO. 4290**

**DIVISION OF PUBLIC UTILITIES AND CARRIERS’
FIRST SET OF DATA REQUESTS TO
THE RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**

**Issued October 1, 2021
Response Due October 11, 2021**

DIV 1-1. Please refer to the response to PUC 1-9 in first Set of PUC Data Requests from December 1, 2020. In that response it was stated that there was a new portal to be used that was created by Fulcimus. The response explained: “Going forward, DHS and the agencies will be discussing and evaluating the ease of use for clients and efficiency of using this portal for the agencies.”

 Please Identify if that portal was utilized in 2021 and if so, was it considered useful and if it was not used, why not?

RI DHS Response (DIV 1-1):

The Fulcimus portal was used by some of the agencies in FFY 2021 and will be used by all of the agencies in FFY 2022. We consider it useful in that it allows applicants to apply online and after business hours. The agencies still need to collect missing documents and information from clients who submit incomplete applications.

DIV 1-2. Identify the anticipated amounts to be issued in the 2021-2022 LIHEAP program year for the following:

- a) Primary grants.
- b) Crisis grants.
- c) LIHEAP Enhancement Grants.

RI DHS Response (DIV 1-2):

- a) Primary grants - See attached benefit matrix
- b) Crisis grants - Deliverable fuel crisis grants = 100 gallons of fuel at the cost of fuel on the day authorized.
Utility crisis grants = up to \$1,500 total but not more than \$1,000 per utility. For example, a client may receive up to \$500 for electric and up to \$1,000 for natural gas. The amount is determined by how much they need to have their utilities turned back on.

c) Enhancement grants - In FFY 2022, the LIHEAP Enhancement grant will be \$300

DIV 1-3. What LIHEAP Enhancement Charge does the Rhode Island Department of Human Services propose for 2022?

RI DHS Response (DIV 1-3):

It is 81 cents. For more information, please see [DHS recommendation](#) sent to Docket 4290 distribution list on 9/2/2021.

DIV 1-4. What steps have been taken to address the barriers discussed in response to DIV 1-10 issued on November 24, 2020? Do you believe the top three barriers have remained the same? If not, please discuss what you currently believe to be the top three barriers.

RI DHS Response (DIV 1-4):

Below we explain the progress we have made on the barriers we identified in December 2020.

1. Awareness – Despite COVID restrictions in FFY 2021, the CAP agencies and the statewide outreach coordinator have added more outreach than in previous years. This is due to the addition of the statewide outreach coordinator working closely with the CAP agencies, and other efforts by DHS.

Some examples of the outreach work follows. The agencies and DHS worked closely with low income housing developments, mobile home parks, health centers, HEZ, school districts, and early childhood providers. In early spring 2021, DHS arranged for United Way's 211 staff to add a short script about applying for LIHEAP to the outgoing calls they made to SNAP households. LIHEAP as advertised in the RING newspapers (digital and paper), agencies did direct mailings to remote areas and targeted social media campaigns. The outreach coordinator teamed up with the 211 RV for stops at various social service organizations. CAP agencies and did direct calling to SNAP households not receiving LIHEAP. DHS also worked closely with National Grid to include information about how to apply for LIHEAP in the mailings that went to National Grid customers. In addition to reaching potential applicants directly, we provided trainings and promotional materials to staff at social service organizations to help create awareness and encourage them to make referrals to the CAP agencies.

In the summer/fall of 2021, CAP agencies have been able to broaden their in-person outreach efforts compared to what was possible in FFY 2021. Many outreach events are able to take place again and the CAP agencies and the statewide outreach coordinator are very active. The outreach work planned or ongoing include: tables at festivals and farmers markets, visiting partner agencies, joining the 211 RV at stops at food pantries and other social service organizations, and attending other special community events. On-site enrollments events at various affordable housing communities in Newport, West

Warwick, North Kingstown, Hopkinton, and South Kingstown are scheduled. More will be scheduled. As senior centers open up to the public, we are planning enrollment events at their locations. We have already scheduled enrollment events at the senior centers in Warwick and West Warwick. Additionally, in FFY 2022, DHS will begin an outreach campaign to households receiving SNAP benefits but not LIHEAP, this will be the result of a data migration project that should begin in January 2022 once the systems for the data migration are set up.

While doing this outreach last season and this season, DHS and the CAP agencies have been making people aware of the income guidelines so that households can determine if they are income eligible for assistance. It has been emphasized in social media campaigns and in trainings with social service and health organizations. The income guidelines are available on the CAP and DHS websites. See a few examples of the social media campaigns in at the end of this document.

2. Transportation – Transportation has not been a barrier in FFY 2021 because the CAP agencies are taking applications over the phone and there has not been a requirement for new applicants to come to the agencies since March 2020. This will continue in FFY 2022. In addition, it appears that more in-person outreach events are being allowed in FFY 2022. These events will help applicants speak in person to intake staff if they chose. In addition, all of the CAP agencies now have an online portal (BVCAP is launching in early October).

1. Reaching households with both undocumented and documented household members (blended immigration status households)– Outreaching to blended households and organizations that work closely with them is an ongoing effort for all the CAP agencies. Community Action Partnership of Providence County (CAPP), with Providence as a catchment area, likely has the largest population of blended immigration status households in the state since it is the most populated city. CAPP has been particularly active in the outreach effort. They have two eligibility specialists focusing on working with blended immigration status families. Working closely with churches, medical centers, and food pantries, the specialist at CAPP helped 88 blended families apply for LIHEAP and other services last year. CAPP has a phone interpretation service with over 250 languages. Other CAP agencies also have bilingual staff, access to languages lines, and work with organizations focused on helping blended immigration status households. The LIHEAP outreach materials are available in Spanish, Portuguese, and Khmer. The application materials are in the process of being translated. The statewide outreach coordinator has recently met with the Center for Southeast Asians (CSEARI) and plans to work on outreach efforts with them. CAPP works closely with Dorcas International in Providence and has plans to set up a satellite site to collect LIHEAP applications, as well as a second location (807 Broad Street) to serve the community. This season, all the agencies will continue to outreach blended households.

DIV 1-5. Please update the chart provided in response to DIV 1-2 issued on November 24, 2020.

RI DHS Response (DIV 1-5):

See table at the end of this document.

DIV 1-6. What is the total projected amount of all LIHEAP Enhancement Grants for the 2021-2022 program year?

RI DHS Response (DIV 1-6):

With the additional outreach DHS and the CAP agencies are doing in FFY 2022, along with the data migration project with SNAP, we estimate that households applying for LIHEAP and therefore receiving the enhancement grant along with the LIHEAP grant(s) will increase by 15%. It is challenging to project this because we need to estimate the number of households applying for LIHEAP, in addition to the breakdown of how these applicant households heat their homes (gas, electric, various types of deliverable fuel) since only the households heating with gas and electric receive the enhancement grant. We based our projections on historical data and our estimates of the impact of the outreach. That said, we are projecting that the LIHEAP Enhancement Grant will total \$7.3 million in FFY 2022.

DIV 1-7. Please discuss the effect, if any, the RentReliefRI program will have on the LIHEAP Enhancement Grant numbers for the 2021-2022 program year.

RI DHS Response (DIV 1-6):

The LIHEAP Enhancement Fund grants to households are connected to the issuance of awards to households from the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) in two ways. First of all, the Benefit Matrix for federal grant awards to those heating with gas or electric are calculated on the issuance of LIHEAP Enhancement funds. Secondly, they are tied operationally in that the utility company's billing and accounting systems invoke the LIHEAP Enhancement award on the issuance of the federal funds. The calculation of household awards and the issuance of these awards will continue as always in the coming heating season.

The RentReliefRI program is supplemental to any benefit of the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program. While the primary purpose of RentReliefRI is exactly that, rent relief, any funds used for utilities are directed to arrearages whereas LIHEAP awards are for current or anticipated charges. The Department of Human Services administration of LIHEAP will follow the federal office's guidance in terms of ensuring that there is no overlap in federal funding.

Table 1 DIV 1-1 FFY 2022 Benefit Matrix



RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

LIHEAP Grant Amounts
Federal Fiscal Year 2022
Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

LIHEAP Grants					
	Poverty Level and Heating Category	Heating Source			
		Deliverables	N/GAS	Electric	Other
A	Up to 75% Federal Poverty Level (FPL)	\$1,201	\$520	\$780	
B	76-100%	\$1,123	\$473	\$709	
C	101-125%	\$1,049	\$430	\$644	
D	126-150%	\$981	\$391	\$586	
E	151% +	\$917	\$355	\$533	
F	Sec. 8 w/ Primary Heating Bill	\$650	\$205	\$310	
G	HIR (Direct payment to household)				\$190
H	HIR (Secondary Electric)				\$125
I	Section 8 HIR (own electric)				\$75

These grant amounts are valid from October 1, 2021 through September 30, 2022

DIV 1-4 Examples of FFY 2021 LIHEAP social media campaigns emphasizing income guidelines.



There is still time to get help with your heating bill. A family of four with a pre-tax household income of up to \$5,171/month or \$62,048/year could be eligible for assistance.

APPLY FOR LIHEAP BY MAY 28TH WITH YOUR LOCAL CAP AGENCY
WWW.RICOMMUNITYACTION.ORG



Todavía hay tiempo para recibir ayuda con su factura de calefacción. Una familia de cuatro integrantes, con un ingreso antes de impuestos de hasta \$5,171 al mes o \$62,048 al año podría ser elegible para recibir asistencia.

ENVÍE SU SOLICITUD LIHEAP ANTES DEL 28 DE MAYO CON SU AGENCIA CAP LOCAL WWW.RICOMMUNITYACTION.ORG

Table 2 Div 1-5 Non Crisis and Crisis Grants by Year by City

Municipality	Total for City FFY 2021	Total for City FFY 2020	Total for City FFY 2019	Total for City FFY 2018	Total for City FFY 2017	Total for City FFY 2016
Barrington	144	142	142	140	138	144
Bristol	390	432	491	451	471	504
Burrillville	398	462	576	450	390	357
Central Falls	742	792	1052	1080	1103	1175
Charlestown	219	204	242	249	171	168
Coventry	863	926	1045	948	808	816
Cranston	2463	2675	3141	2948	2724	2776
Cumberland	475	504	587	560	570	589
East Greenwich	131	154	148	121	120	131
East Providence	1134	1272	1425	1319	1262	1344
Exeter	130	132	144	119	104	106
Foster	117	108	138	118	96	97
Glocester	221	257	309	294	227	205
Hopkinton	215	232	244	212	159	163
Jamestown	29	25	28	28	26	32
Johnston	1053	1179	1372	1368	1146	1102
Lincoln	311	320	343	350	358	362
Little Compton	48	61	66	61	54	53
Middletown	131	144	167	142	135	141
Narragansett	181	194	212	213	205	208
Newport	285	321	376	351	346	360
New Shoreham	4	4	4	3	4	4
North Kingstown	651	676	707	653	577	591
North Providence	965	1042	1194	1141	1065	1043
North Smithfield	123	149	171	168	164	168
Pawtucket	2601	2844	3355	3473	3598	3838
Portsmouth	184	195	225	209	196	197
Providence	7386	8764	10371	10666	10272	10227
Richmond	90	78	103	88	64	71
Scituate	149	157	201	201	158	134
Smithfield	342	347	386	357	325	293
South Kingstown	473	495	533	503	428	400
Tiverton	460	470	566	527	496	534
Warren	319	339	400	388	398	426
Warwick	1897	1943	2083	1918	1788	1829
Westerly	710	731	850	750	690	677
West Greenwich	92	106	111	106	78	74
West Warwick	971	1085	1243	1083	935	895
Woonsocket	1273	1498	1754	1366	1391	1567
Totals	28,370	31,459	36,505	35,122	33,240	33,801