

States Call for Utilities to Suspend Shut-Offs During the Heat Emergency, Providing Emergency Funding to Pay Cooling Bills and the Develop a National Cooling Strategy for Low Income Families

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The National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA), representing the state directors of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) and the Center for Energy Poverty and Climate (CEPC) is calling on:

- Electric and water utilities to stop shut-offs for families who cannot pay their bill during the current summer heat waves.
- Congress to provide \$3 billion in emergency supplemental LIHEAP assistance to help families pay their cooling bills and \$1 billion in emergency water assistance.
- Congress to develop a national cooling strategy to help low-income families have access to affordable and energy efficient cooling.
- Congress to extend the emergency Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) and to develop a permanent program to help with household water bills.

Whether you live in the northeast and Midwest where Canadian wildfires are causing record-breaking air quality issues, or in the south where a heat wave has wrought scorching temperatures for three weeks straight, it is a bad time to be outside for many Americans. But for the estimated one million households who will be shut off from electricity this summer because they cannot afford their bills, even being inside their homes is dangerous. In less extreme situations, a family can ride out a hot day by opening a few windows, taking a cool shower, and hoping it cools down at night. But when the heat has persisted for weeks, or the outside air is dangerous, opening a window will only make things worse.

The current weather and air quality emergencies are putting millions of Americans at risk of heat-related and respiratory illnesses as well as unaffordable home energy bills. Many low income families will not be able to afford these bills and will in fact the shut-off of vital energy services. Of the 34.2 million LIHEAP-eligible households, federal funding is only sufficient to help about 5.8 million households. In addition, according to a recent study, utility heat-related shut-off rules provide limited coverage and 20 states have no summer shut-off protections in place.

NEADA is calling on utilities in affected areas to voluntarily suspend shutoffs this summer for families behind on their bills. [Fourteen people](#) have already died due to the extreme heat across the south, most of them elderly and suffering from underlying health conditions. As the extreme weather and air quality issues persist around the country, those numbers will rise.

In addition, NEADA is calling on Congress to pass legislation that would develop a long term plan to help families have access to affordable and energy efficient cooling. According to Mark Wolfe, Executive Director of NEADA and Co-Director of CEPC, this is the third year in a row of extreme weather conditions in the US. We should treat access to cooling just like we treat access to heating in the winter – we should expect it and develop programs that help low income families stay safe and in their homes.

Current strategies including access to cooling centers were appropriate when summer temperatures were lower and heat waves were sporadic rather than continuous.

With limited federal and state funding for cooling assistance, options are severely limited for families in affected areas. LIHEAP is the primary federal program helping poor families pay their home energy bills. Right now, states only have sufficient funds to help with heating costs. Approximately 85 percent of LIHEAP benefit funds are used to address winter energy needs. The program needs double the resources to provide assistance to families without cutting winter benefits.

NEADA is also calling on Congress to extend and add funds to the LIHWAP which currently expires at the end of September and develop a permanent water bill assistance program. Access to clean water is just as important as access to cooling during hot summer months. And the need is increasing. A [2020 report](#) by the Guardian found that home water and wastewater costs rose 80 percent between 2010 and 2018. As water costs continue to rise it will become even more unaffordable for low-income households. States and HHS have done an admirable job standing up LIHWAP to provide water bill assistance to struggling American families. NEADA supports the creation of a permanent, stand-alone water assistance program that provides both bill assistance and water system repair and replacement.

Congress should provide an additional \$3 billion for cooling assistance this summer, that would help to provide supplemental LIHEAP assistance for about 6 million families. This would cover both bill assistance and air conditioning repair or replacement. It should also extend LIHWAP and add \$1 billion to the program.

It's the least we can do. Families shouldn't have to suffer or move to cooling centers to prevent heat- and air quality-related illness this summer.