



**For Immediate Release:**  
June 19, 2015

**Contact:** Michael Shalley, Member Services Director  
517-679-6403, [mshalley@michigancommunityaction.org](mailto:mshalley@michigancommunityaction.org)

## **Utilities should fund Low-Income Energy Assistance**

For the equivalent of less than a nickel per customer per day, Michigan utilities once again have an opportunity to ensure that vulnerable seniors and low-income families receive bill-paying assistance if they fall on hard times.

The state's electric and gas utilities have until July 1 to agree to contribute to the Low-Income Energy Assistance Fund (LIEAF), which Michigan legislators created in 2012 to help low-income customers reach energy self-sufficiency.

The program is working, but the need remains. During fiscal year 2014, the fund assisted 87,647 low-income Michigan households with energy bills and services to help them move toward self-sufficiency. We urge all Michigan utilities to opt in to the program and help ensure energy security for our most vulnerable citizens.

Utility participation in the Michigan Energy Assistance Program (MEAP), which LIEAF collections help finance, not only demonstrates good corporate citizenship, but it also makes financial sense because it helps reduce bill arrearages that cost utilities – and, ultimately, their ratepayers – money.

The cumulative costs of unpaid or past-due bills far outstrip the maximum \$1 per month per customer that utilities collect for the Low-Income Energy Assistance Fund.

The fund provides help to utilities' most vulnerable customers. Only households with incomes of less than 150 percent of the federal poverty guideline, which in 2014 equated to \$35,775 for a family of four, are eligible for assistance. Those who receive help include seniors on fixed incomes and families with young children who have fallen behind on their utility bills after experiencing illness, unemployment or a death in the family.

By promoting the timely payment of bills, the fund helps improve cash flow in vulnerable households, helping ensure they can meet other basic needs such as food and clothing. The program also promotes personal responsibility by providing participating households with information and education on energy conservation, with the ultimate goal of allowing them to use only what they can afford.

Participation in the fund also gives utilities the opportunity to work year-round with customers who have fallen behind in their payments. Utilities that elect not to participate may not shut off service to any residential customer from Nov. 1 to April 15 for nonpayment of a delinquent account.

In the past, not all Michigan utilities opted in, so we hope for greater participation this year, which will benefit more Michigan residents who are working toward self-sufficiency and better energy conservation.

*Founded in 1975, Michigan Community Action serves its 29 member agencies throughout Michigan by strengthening their capacity to alleviate the causes and circumstances of poverty in all 83 counties.*