



**For Immediate Release**  
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## **MCA urges utilities to fund Low-Income Energy Assistance**

Michigan Community Action is urging the state's utility companies to contribute to the Low-Income Energy Assistance Fund (LIEAF), which Michigan legislators created in 2013 to help low-income customers reach energy self-sufficiency.

Utilities have until July 1 to opt in and agree to collect up to \$1 per customer a month to provide bill-payment assistance and energy conservation education to eligible low-income households.

"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 assistance if they fall on hard times," says **Kate Birnbryer-White**, executive director of Michigan Community Action, a statewide association of 29 action agencies addressing poverty in all 83 Michigan counties.

The program is working, but not all utilities have opted in to collect the surcharge in the past, Birnbryer-White explains.

LIEAF funds are expended through the Michigan Energy Assistance Program. The Michigan Public Service Commission reports that 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.

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 assistance are among our most vulnerable citizens, including 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,” Birnbryer-White says.

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.

“Utility participation in the program not only demonstrates good corporate citizenship and shared responsibility,” notes Birnbryer-White, “but it also makes financial sense because it helps reduce bill arrearages that cost utilities – and, ultimately, their ratepayers – money.”

*Kate White is the executive director of Michigan Community Action, a statewide association of 29 community action agencies addressing poverty in all 83 Michigan counties.*