



Health and Human Services Board

Lucy Lawrence
Board Chair

August 26, 2022

Delegates name and address inserted here

Dear _____,

I write to you as chair of the Buncombe County Health and Human Services Board to advocate for a change in the general statutes that will better serve the residents of Buncombe County as well as residents across the state of North Carolina. Our concern is General Statute 108A-25.4 (Use of Payments Under the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program and Crisis Intervention Program). The statute currently states:

- (a) The Low-Income Energy Assistance Program Plan developed by the Department of Health and Human Services (Department) and submitted to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services shall focus the annual energy assistance payments on the elderly population age 60 and above with income up to one hundred thirty percent (130%) of the federal poverty level and disabled persons receiving services through the Division of Aging and Adult Services. The energy assistance payment shall be paid directly to the service provider by the county department of social services. The Plan for Crisis Intervention Program (CIP) shall provide assistance for vulnerable populations who meet income eligibility criteria established by the Department. The CIP payment shall be paid directly to the service provider by the county department of social services and shall not exceed six hundred dollars (\$600.00) per household in a fiscal year.
- (b) The Department shall submit the Plan for each program to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services no later than September 1 of each year and implement the Plan no later than October 1 of each year. (2011-145, s. 10.56(a).)

Our concern rises from the fact that increasing energy costs far exceed the \$600 payment amount codified in the statute for the Crisis Intervention Program (CIP). Our understanding is this benefit limit has not changed since 2011, although electricity rates in NC have increased 44% since 2001. \$600 is simply not adequate to alleviate an emergency an applicant may have. The Public Health Emergency (PHE) of the COVID-19 pandemic has also created situations where individuals have been unable to pay their heating and cooling expenses, and the allotted \$600 may not prevent disconnection of service to the home. We would also request that the General Assembly strongly suggest to NC DHHS an increase to the Low-Income Energy Assistance Payment (LIEAP) at a higher level than the \$300, \$400, or \$500 payment that is now offered. Many times, this payment is only sufficient to provide short term help with heating and cooling needs for some of our most vulnerable populations.



In summary, our ask is to increase the maximum CIP payment set by the general statutes, and to encourage NC DHHS to raise payment amounts for CIP and LIEAP at responsible levels considering the current economic times. This will help all residents who are applying for the energy programs in North Carolina maintain the heating and cooling sources in their homes with confidence and dignity.

We are available to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for your time and attention.

With highest regard,

Lucy A. Lawrence, MSW, PhD
HHS Board Chairperson

