

NEW JERSEY HOMEKEEPER AND HEATING ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

NEW JERSEY HOMEKEEPER PROGRAM

The New Jersey Housing Mortgage Finance Agency announced the New Jersey HomeKeeper Program funded through a grant from the U.S. Treasury's Hardest Hit Fund. The HomeKeeper Program offers financial help to homeowners who are in danger of losing their home as a direct result of unemployment or underemployment. NJ HomeKeeper provides assistance in the form of a second mortgage loan, repayable only if the homeowner sells, refinances, transfers or ceases to occupy the subject property within ten years from the date of the assistance loan. NJ HomeKeeper loan proceeds may be used to cover arrearages and/or an approved amount of the homeowner's monthly mortgage payment, including property taxes, property insurance, and mortgage insurance. Housing counseling is also provided to prospective applicants at no cost. Eligible homeowners may receive financial assistance of up to \$48,000 for a period not to exceed 24 months. If you or anyone you know may be interested in the program, please go to www.njhomekeeper.gov or contact the toll-free HomeKeeper call center at 855-NJ-KEEP-1.

HOME HEATING ASSISTANCE

The Department of Community Affairs recently announced that supplemental benefits are available through the federally-funded Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). As a service to the community, could you please post the following public announcement information on your municipality's website and share it with any organization in your community that might find it beneficial?

Eligible households do not need to reapply for the program to receive supplemental benefits. The benefits are available because LIHEAP funding for the year increased beyond the original projection provided by the federal government.

Nearly 158,000 households that heat their homes with gas will receive an added benefit of \$100 while those that heat with electric will receive a \$250 benefit. Approximately 28,000 families that heat with deliverable fuels, such as oil or propane, will receive a \$175 supplemental benefit. Also, about 51,000 households that received medically-required cooling assistance will receive a \$100 supplemental benefit.

The DCA's Division of Housing and Community Resources administers the LIHEAP program, which is a federally-funded initiative that helps low-income residents with their heating and cooling bills, and makes provisions for emergency heating system services and emergency fuel assistance. To be eligible for LIHEAP benefits, a household must be responsible for home heating or cooling costs, either directly or included in the rent; and have gross income at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.

The LIHEAP application also serves as an application for the Universal Service Fund (USF) Program, which is run by the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities. USF helps low-income households pay for their electric and natural gas costs. LIHEAP eligible households may also be eligible to receive USF assistance.

To be eligible for USF, a household gross income must be at or below 175% of the federal poverty level, and pay more than 3% of its annual income for electric, or more than 3% for natural gas. If a household has electric heat, it must spend more than 6% of its annual income on electricity to be eligible. USF applications are accepted throughout the year.

For more information on LIHEAP, or to find the nearest agency participating in the program, please log on to www.energyassistance.nj.gov or call 1-800-510-3102 (LIHEAP)