



## Thousands To Lose Utility Assistance

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Thousands of people in Michigan could have their heat turned off this fall after some programs that help low-income people with utilities are cut.

One of those is the state's Low Income Energy Efficiency Program. It helped nearly 95,000 people last year and brought \$240 million into the state last year. These changes are sending chills through local social service agencies.

The leaves are changing and that means it's nearly time to turn on the heat, but for some heating a home can mean they won't have money for other basic things.

"When we're looking at a family who their only income may be SSI or cash assistance, it's very difficult to keep those utilities on," said Jamie Riehle with the Community Action Agency.

Workers at the Community Action Agency say there's already been a flood of people coming in and asking for help.

"We don't have anything available for people who are in danger of using their utilities, or have already lost their utilities," said Riehle, "I'm a little scared for what's going to happen this fall. Especially once, I mean we're just at the beginning of heating season, and in another month we'll have another influx of people coming in for assistance."

One of the reasons why some of the assistance is no longer available is because the state assistance program that drew funding from surcharges on people's monthly utility bills is frozen in court.

"We challenged that on the base that the commission had no authority to increase rates at about 90 million dollars a year," said Riehle.

The Community Action Agency says there are still avenues for help.

"That's always been our philosophy here, is if we can't help you here, we will find somebody who can help you. Sometimes that takes a while. But we do what we can," said Riehle.

If you find that you are losing assistance with utilities and may have them turned off call 211. That will connect you with information and resources that could help.