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Governor Bullock Extends Energy Assistance for Thousands of Montanans Impacted by COVID-19

MONTANA – Governor Steve Bullock today announced he is directing \$5 million in federal CARES Act funds to expand assistance to thousands of Montanans struggling to afford their home energy needs due to financial strain caused by COVID-19.

“Montana families shouldn’t have to choose between putting food on the table and paying their utility bill,” Governor Bullock said. **“This funding is critical to keeping families afloat and will give peace of mind to thousands of current LIEAP clients, and to thousands more Montanans who will now be eligible for the program.”**

The \$5 million in federal funding will be used to provide COVID-19 supplemental assistance to approximately 18,000 current Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) clients. It will also be used to fund the LIEAP Emergency COVID-19 Energy Assistance Program, which the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) estimates will provide energy assistance to an additional 6,000 Montana households. These funds are not part of the \$1.25 billion Coronavirus Relief Fund allocated to the state.

Current LIEAP program recipients will automatically receive the supplemental assistance. The supplemental benefit will be applied toward the recipient’s electric bill, since the electricity cost is usually higher during the summer months. Further, current LIEAP clients will be able to have any remaining 2019-2020 season benefit applied to their accounts rather than being returned at the end of the heating season as is normally the case.

Individuals who are not current LIEAP clients can apply for the new Emergency COVID-19 Energy Assistance program by contacting their local LIEAP office. Individuals can also call the

toll-free LIEAP number at 1-833-317-1080. Applications are available now for both homeowners and renters.

“We know these are challenging times for Montana families, and we are here to respond to the immediate needs of the people we serve,” DPHHS Director Sheila Hogan said. **“We strongly encourage families who think they may be eligible to apply.”**

Eligibility for LIEAP is based on household income and resource limits. The Emergency COVID-19 Energy Assistance Program will use a one-month income (annualized) lookback period to determine eligibility. For example, a family of four with monthly household income of \$4,046.00 would be eligible. For new clients, unemployment and/or documented proof of loss of wages related to COVID-19 may also be used to determine eligibility.

Households that receive support from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program may qualify automatically for energy assistance.

The benefit period for the program will run from today through August 31, 2020 or until funds are expended.

In addition to the \$5 million received by the State of Montana, Tribal LIHEAP programs in Montana received \$1 million in direct supplemental funding through the CARES Act. Tribal program participants are encouraged to contact their local Tribal LIHEAP offices for information about how these funds will be allocated.

Additional information about LIEAP is available at www.lieap.mt.gov.