



PHOTO COURTESY OF PIXABAY

There are many resources in the community to help those facing shut-off notices to keep the lights on.

Need help paying energy bills? Here's where to go

KAELLEN HESSEL
STATESMAN JOURNAL

When people start to struggle financially, one of the first things they struggle with is paying utility bills, said Roberta Moore, board chairwoman of Congregations Helping People.

Inability to pay for utilities, like electricity and heat, is the second-most-frequent request from the nonprofit's clients.

Congregations Helping People has social workers and volunteers to link people with the right resources to meet their immediate and long-term needs.

"It's very important that people be able to find a resource to help with their utility bills," Moore said.

Many nonprofits and social service agencies offer utility assistance. If you find yourself needing help, here are some places to go.

Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency

Its Energy Assistance Program has state and federal funds for Marion and Polk County residents to use to pay for utilities.

"We do have plenty of funding right now," said Raquel Garcia, operations manager.

Residents with a household income within 60 percent of the statewide median income guidelines are eligible. People can receive assistance once a year.

Those seeking assistance must bring copies of valid Social Security numbers for all household members (verification is mandatory for some programs); birthdates for everyone in the home; valid ID for all adults in the household; heating and electric bills for the current address; and proof of gross income. The account holder must live at the address on the bill.

"We encourage people to come down before any notices are issued," Garcia said.

To learn more, call 503-588-9016 or 1-866-299-4216 (toll free).

Congregations Helping People

CHP has multiple financial sources for utility assistance. Some of the funding requires people to have a monthly

minimum income, including unemployment and social security, Moore said.

"We like to be part of putting (people) back on the road to stabilizing their finances," she said.

Once a shutoff notice has been issued, it's too late for CHP to give out money. However, they can work with people to find other community resources that might be able to help, Moore said.

"If you need the last \$50, we're probably going to be the right people to come to," she said.

To learn more, call 503-391-4365.

Northwest Human Services Crisis & Information Hotline

The crisis hotline can provide limited emergency assistance to prevent electric and water disconnections, according to its website.

In order to be eligible, people must live within Salem city limits; meet income guidelines; and have a five-day shutoff notice, past due and disconnect bill, or already had their utilities shut off.

The hotline sets up a meeting, where applicants bring photo ID, the utility bill with their name on it and proof of their income level (such as approval documentation for other assistance programs). To learn more, call 503-581-5535 or 1-800-560-5535 (toll free).

Society of St. Vincent de Paul

The Catholic lay organization can help pay rent, electric, water and some medical bills. Each year, the nonprofit spends \$57,000 on energy assistance, rent and other emergency services, officials said.

According to its website, an emergency is defined as facing an eviction or the threat of having a utility turned off.

Typically, the organization will pay the last \$50 of a bill, according to its website. If the bill is for \$200, the account holder will have to come up with \$150. To learn more, call 503-364-3210.

The Royal Order of Red Suspenders

This Salem Alliance Church ministry delivers free firewood to those in need. The ministry only accepts requests between Oct. 1 and April 30, according to

its website. To apply, call 503-581-2129, ext. 325.

Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs

Its Emergency Financial Assistance Program can be used for utility bills, as well as emergency medical expenses, temporary housing and rent assistance, according to ODVA's website.

The program is open to veterans and their immediate family.

To learn more, call 503-373-2085 or 1-800-692-9666 (toll free).

City of Salem

The Wastewater Rate Assistance Program offers a discounted bill to senior citizens and disabled household heads.

The program is available to residents in Salem, Keizer and the East Salem Sewer District and other areas served by the City of Salem wastewater utility, according to its website. For information, call 503-588-6099.

Salem Electric

The utility company's Energy Assistance Program is available to low-income members whose main heating source is electricity. Priority is given to seniors and people with disabilities.

Assistance is limited to one payment per household each heating season. Households receive between \$150 and \$225, according to a brochure.

Members also may qualify for free weatherization, such as insulation and weatherstripping. For more information, call 503-362-3601.

Other resources

The Salvation Army can provide financial assistance for rent, housing deposits, utilities, medicine and transportation. It also has emergency food. To learn more, call 503-585-6688.

There's also a Basic Needs Assistance Program through Serving Our Veterans At Home. This program can help veterans with utilities, groceries and bus passes. To learn more, go to SOVAH.org.

Email khessel@statesmanjournal.com, call 503-399-6743 or follow on Twitter @KaellenHessel