

LIHEAP program not at risk this year, but future funding remains uncertain

BY NIKKI STANLEY

The administration of President Donald J. Trump has once again caused a stir among the United States citizens and governments alike. In what is said to be an attempt at “restructuring” the agency, the roughly two-dozen federal employees, approximately 20 to 25, that oversee the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) have been laid off.

This move has sparked vehement concerns about the state of the LIHEAP program, and many fear this firing escapade will affect life as they know it. Will they be able to afford their heating bills in more Northern states for the remainder of the winter season? Will they be able to afford the cooling bills for the upcoming summer heat? Fears continue to stir across the United States.

It appears that the two-dozen employees that were let go were only a small part of a much larger layoff of 10,000 employees in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Earlier this year, Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. shared in an interview with NewsNation about Health and Human Services (HHS), “It’s a sprawling agency...we have over 100 comms departments. We have forty procurement departments. We have dozens of IT departments. Dozens of HR departments. None of them talk to each other. And what we’re trying to do now is to streamline the agency to eliminate the redundancies and to focus the mission so that everybody who is at HHS

				Benefit	
# of People in HH	Income Range			Non Subsidized housing	Subsidized Housing
1	0-75%	\$0.00 -	\$984.52	184	41
	76-100%	\$984.53 -	\$1,310.56	167	45
	101-125%	\$1,310.57 -	\$1,636.60	150	51
	126-150%	\$1,636.61 -	\$1,962.64	134	56
2	0-75%	\$0.00 -	\$1,330.51	200	45
	76-100%	\$1,330.52 -	\$1,771.14	184	51
	101-125%	\$1,771.15 -	\$2,211.76	167	56
	126-150%	\$2,211.77 -	\$2,652.39	150	60
3	0-75%	\$0.00 -	\$1,676.51	217	51
	76-100%	\$1,676.52 -	\$2,231.72	200	56
	101-125%	\$2,231.73 -	\$2,786.92	184	60
	126-150%	\$2,786.93 -	\$3,342.13	167	66
4	0-75%	\$0.00 -	\$2,022.50	234	56
	76-100%	\$2,022.51 -	\$2,692.29	217	60
	101-125%	\$2,692.30 -	\$3,362.09	200	66
	126-150%	\$3,362.10 -	\$4,031.88	184	71

				Benefit	
# of People in HH	Income Range			Non Subsidized housing	Subsidized Housing
5	0-75%	\$0.00 -	\$2,368.50	250	60
	76-100%	\$2,368.51 -	\$3,152.87	234	66
	101-125%	\$3,152.88 -	\$3,937.25	217	71
	126-150%	\$3,937.26 -	\$4,721.62	200	75
6	0-75%	\$0.00 -	\$2,714.49	250	60
	76-100%	\$2,714.50 -	\$3,613.45	234	66
	101-125%	\$3,613.46 -	\$4,512.41	217	71
	126-150%	\$4,512.42 -	\$5,411.37	200	75
7	0-75%	\$0.00 -	\$3,060.49	250	60
	76-100%	\$3,060.50 -	\$4,074.03	234	66
	101-125%	\$4,074.04 -	\$5,087.57	217	71
	126-150%	\$5,087.58 -	\$6,101.12	200	75
8	0-75%	\$0.00 -	\$3,406.49	250	60
	76-100%	\$3,406.50 -	\$4,534.61	234	66
	101-125%	\$4,534.62 -	\$5,662.74	217	71
	126-150%	\$5,662.75 -	\$6,790.86	200	75

is going to wake up every morning and say ‘What am I going to do today to make America healthy again?’ and we’re going to make it easier for those [people]. We’re not cutting scientists. We’re not cutting front-line workers. We’re cutting administrators and we’re consolidating the agency to make it more efficient.”

As reported by The Hill, “Kennedy suggests 20 percent of HHS cuts may be reversed.”

While LIHEAP’s future is in question, President/CEO of KCEOC Paul Dole spoke

confidently when asked how these cuts in D.C. will affect his organization and its LIHEAP programs, “Well right now it won’t affect us at all... The state’s already drawn down most all of this year’s funding. So... the money for this year is already in Frankfurt. For right now, that’s not going to have an effect.”

So, while the uncertainty can feel pressing, Knox Countians and others can rest assured that Kentucky will be unaffected by these drastic changes for the remainder of this year, and if Secretary Kennedy does plan

to reverse 20 percent of the jobs cuts that affect the LIHEAP program at the federal level, we may be looking at a continuation of the LIHEAP program. The program’s future, beyond this current fiscal year, remains to be seen.

Meanwhile, KCEOC will soon be accepting applications for LIHEAP assistance. Beginning on April 15 through May 30, those eligible households needing assistance may apply for funds to help offset the cost of their electricity bills. The benefits are paid directly to the electric vendor, not the customer.

The program, while scheduled to run through May 30 may end prematurely if funds are depleted, as the program serves households on a first-come, first-served basis.

Income eligibility for LIHEAP assistance is up to and including 150% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, and benefits can range from \$41 to \$250, depending on income and housing categories.

Applicants be required to supply the following to be considered for LIHEAP assistance:

- Proof of Social Security number or permanent resi-

dence card (Green Card) for each member of the household;

- Proof of all household’s (all members’ income from the preceding month;

- Most current electric service bill including account number and name on account, statement from the landlord if utility expenses are included in rent, statement from the utility company if you participate in a Pre-Pay Program.

To schedule an appointment to apply for LIHEAP assistance, call 606-595-8062.

Sheriff Smith discusses 2023 Financial Statement Findings in State Auditor’s Report

BY NIKKI STANLEY

The audit reports have been released for the Knox County Sheriff’s 2023 financial statement with two comments from the state auditor, Auditor of Public Accounts Allison Ball. According to the statement from the auditor’s office, “State law requires the auditor to annually audit the accounts of each county sheriff. In compliance with this law, the auditor issues two sheriff’s reports each year: one reporting on the audit of the sheriff’s tax account, and the other reporting on the audit of the fee account used to operate the office.”

According to Ball, the audit reports two comments:

The Knox County Sheriff did not segregate accounting duties or document compensating controls.

The audit report noted it is a repeat finding and was included in previous years’ reports. “The Knox County Sheriff did not segregate accounting duties or document compensating controls: The sheriff’s office manager collects payments from customers, prepares bank deposits, issues checks, and posts to the receipts and disbursements ledgers. The sheriff’s part-time bookkeeper prepares bank reconciliations, prepares payroll, and occasionally collects payments from customers.

“Front-line office personnel prepare their own deposits, but the office manager takes them to the bank. Neither the office manager nor the bookkeeper are authorized check signers, but both are responsible for preparing monthly and quarterly reports.”

Sheriff Mike Smith responded: “The Segregation of Duties comment is due to personnel hiring limitations.”

“The Knox County Sheriff did not comply with bidding requirements set forth in KRS 424.260 or The Guide to Equitable Sharing for State, Local, and Tribal Law Enforcement Agencies.”



The audit report stated, “The sheriff’s office remitted \$99,080 of federal forfeiture funds for Operation UNITE’s purchase of two vehicles totaling \$99,080. These vehicles are not in the possession of the sheriff’s office and were obtained without obtaining bids. The sheriff serves as a member and/or fiduciary agency of/with the Operation UNITE task force and was unaware of the bidding requirement. The sheriff was unaware the vehicles were to be in the sheriff’s office’s possession.”

Knox County Sheriff Mike Smith responded: “The Sheriff’s Office holds a fiduciary account for Operation UNITE. They made a purchase under their guidelines from this account that the auditor mentioned. The Sheriff’s Office did not make the purchase for the item nor was the item assigned to the Sheriff’s Office.”

In response to the findings, Sheriff Smith said “The audit went well with the fee funds accounted for. The administrative staff works hard and is dedicated to ensure the fee account is in accordance with law.”

For a full copy of the Sheriff’s 2023 financial statement audit, see this story on mountain-advocate.com.

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Lou Anne Akers, SCSEP Career Coach (Knox, Bell, Harlan and Leslie)
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