

Bob Taft
Governor



Jacqueline Romer-Sensky
Director

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January 25, 2001

OWF/PRC Guidance Letter No. 36

TO: Directors, County Departments of Job and Family Services

FROM: Jacqueline Romer-Sensky, Director

SUBJECT: PROJECT THAW (TEMPORARY HEATING ASSISTANCE FOR WARMTH)

The purpose of this guidance letter is to provide information regarding Project Thaw. In Governor Bob Taft's State-of-the-State address on January 24, 2001, he announced the creation of Project Thaw, a one-time home heating benefit of up to \$250 to assist with this winter's high home heating costs. The program will be administered by the County Departments of Job and Family Services (CDJFS).

The program is intended to assist with home heating costs for both families and individuals. The funding will come from two separate sources:

- ' \$25 million of TANF funds for families with minor children; and
- ' up to \$20 million from a General Revenue Fund (GRF) appropriation that Governor Taft will request from the General Assembly

The program requirements and instructions for implementation outlined in this letter will apply to both families and individuals, with exceptions noted.

Funding Sources

Families: The funding for families with minor children is already in place and benefits will be provided through the county's PRC program. Each CDJFS will need to amend their existing PRC plan by signing the attached Project THAW PRC Plan Amendment page.

PRC amendments are to be faxed to: Debra Radcliffe, PRC Coordinator
Fax #: 614-752-7193

Individuals: As indicated earlier in this letter, GRF funding for individuals will be requested from the

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General Assembly and has not been appropriated at this time. Counties will be notified as soon as the funds become available.

Fiscal Coding

The following financial codes have been established for Project Thaw:

Line codes will be 2-1201 TANF THAW
2-1951 GRF THAW (inactive until appropriation is available)

Financial codes will be 160-50 TANF THAW
165-50 GRF THAW (inactive until appropriation is available)

These funds are outside of the consolidated allocation and are available upon request. TANF funds may be accessed immediately. As indicated, we are in the process of obtaining GRF funding and counties will be notified as soon as these funds become available.

Supplemental advance requests will be honored for services provided under Project THAW.

Begin and End Dates

Project THAW will begin Monday January 29, 2001 and run through close of business on Friday March 30, 2001 contingent upon funding. Applications for families with minor children may be processed immediately. Applications for individuals should be accepted and may be processed upon confirmation of receipt of the appropriation. Again, at the time of the issuance of this letter, the appropriation has not been made for non-TANF eligibles. While we anticipate this issue being addressed very soon, counties need to be aware that no GRF has been appropriated at this time.

Applications

Each CDJFS has flexibility regarding the application form and application processing issues. The CDJFS may choose to administer the program directly or contract with another entity such as a community action agency.

A face-to-face interview is not required. A sample application is attached, however, counties may develop their own application for Project THAW or use an existing application such as the application for HEAP (available on the Ohio Department of Development's Internet site: www.odod.state.oh.us).

Eligibility

Families and individuals with household gross income at or below 200% of the federal poverty level will be eligible for assistance through Project THAW. There is no resource limit for receipt of Project THAW.

To be eligible, the family or individual must be responsible for heating costs in their own home or rental unit. The following individuals are ineligible: residents of any licensed medical facility (hospital,

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skilled nursing facility or intermediate care facility), publicly operated community residences (example: YMCA), boarding/rooming houses, group homes, or emergency shelters.

The income methodologies outlined in the State PRC model (Ref. OWF/PRC Guidance letter No.13, page 17) must be used to determine eligibility for Project THAW.

For Project THAW, benefits to families under the county's PRC plan must meet all the requirements of Title IV-A, federal regulations, state law and the TANF state plan (for example, the notice and hearing requirements, the assistance group must contain a minor child/pregnant woman, etc.).

Counties must retain a copy of the primary home heating bill and any other applicable documentation for which Project THAW assistance is authorized.

Benefit Amount

Eligible households will receive assistance for 50% of their current primary heating bill and 50% of any unpaid balances back to 12/1/00, up to a maximum of \$250. This is a one-time-only payment. Therefore, households cannot receive assistance in one month and receive it again the following month even though the household is still under the \$250 maximum amount.

Eligible households on a budget plan with their primary heating company, are eligible for 50% of their total current bill and 50% of any unpaid bills back to 12/1/00, up to a maximum of \$250.

For households on the Percentage of Income (PIP) plan, the current total PIP payment and PIP payments that are in arrears back to 12/01/00 may be paid. This applies only to the PIP payment not to the current usage or the accumulated arrearage amounts.

Eligible households whose primary heating source is heating oil, propane, coal or wood are eligible for payment of 50% of their current bill or, in the case of heating oil or propane, the cost to fill their tank up to a maximum of \$250.

The CDJFS' current system of payment to utility companies should be followed (e.g., vouchers to utility companies, checks/vouchers to fuel oil provider, etc.)

Interaction With Other Programs

Project THAW will provide assistance over and above Ohio's existing low-income assistance programs such as HEAP or counties current PRC utility programs. Even though a county may have recently paid a utility bill for a PRC eligible household, Project THAW assistance can also be authorized to the same household. Project THAW assistance can also be authorized because, due to the extraordinary cost of home heating this winter these costs can be considered to be a specific crisis situation. In addition assistance under Project THAW should not be denied due to any current county specific limits (such as once every 12 months or being under an OWF sanction).

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Counties can however supplement the maximum Project THAW limit with their own PRC allocations if they choose to do so. Counties choosing this option need to state this on the attached PRC plan amendment. **This option can only be used for families and not for individuals.**

All households who are currently not participating in PIP through their utility companies and are at or below 150% of the federal poverty level must be referred to the HEAP program.

Reporting/Tracking

Benefit issuance for Project THAW will be tracked through CRIS-E. Two new codes will be available on the TPRX table in CRIS-E.

- 23 PROJECT THAW - PRC FAMILY
- 24 PROJECT THAW - GRF INDIVIDUAL (inactive until appropriation is available)

Hotline Number

The Department of Development has established a “THAW Hotline” to assist in answering questions concerning Project THAW. The toll free phone number is 1-866-901-6446. The hotline provides basic information about eligibility and then refers the individual to the appropriate CDJFS.

Moratorium

Governor Taft has asked the Chairman of the PUCO to order a 60-day moratorium on all home-heating disconnections. This order will include a requirement that to receive this protection, a customer must participate in a company sponsored payment plan.

JRS/jc

Attachments

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|----|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| c: | County Commissioners Assoc. | Cheri Walter |
| | PCSAO | Deputy Directors |
| | Regional Account Managers | Deputy Account Managers |
| | Fiscal Supervisors | LouAnn Shy |
| | Joel Potts | Technical Assistance Managers |
| | Wayne Sholes | Bureau Chiefs/OWD |
| | Stan Sells | Bill Demidovich |
| | John E. Schuster | Rick Smith |
| | OJFSDA | Jeanne Carroll |
| | Jane Frye | Debra Radcliffe |