



Montana People's Action

"The voice of low and moderate income Montanans"

June 8, 2004

Jim Nolan, Bureau Chief
Intergovernmental Human Services bureau
Department of Public Health and Human Services
1400 Carter Drive
Helena, Montana 59620

Dear Jim:

We are writing concerning the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP). We are interested in exploring ways to reduce barriers low income households may experience when applying for LIEAP. Those households with whom we work have told us that the need for 12 months of income documentation is burdensome, as is the length of the LIEAP application. Other states use a shorter application and use only 1 or 3 months of income for documenting eligibility. Montana Peoples' Action (MPA) and Indian Peoples' Action have indicated their intention to request that DPHHS move from the use of a 12 month period to document income, to a 1 or 3 month period. MPA and IPA are also recommending that the LIEAP application form be revised so as to shorten its length. The Human Resource Council (HRC) Board of Directors is considering whether to make such recommendations. However, all three of the organizations would like more information. For instance, is there any way to determine the impact to seasonal workers if less than 12 months is used? If less than 12 months is used, will there be an adverse impact to those on Social Security Benefits who also have earned income in certain periods of the year? Likewise, for those households who have been receiving unemployment benefits and have earned income, will a shorter income documentation period have an adverse impact?

The other question raised by the HRC Board is the impact on the benefit levels if more households apply. Given the finite resources available for LIEAP will an increase in households served reduce the benefit given to households? Also customers of NorthWestern Energy who receive LIEAP benefits receive a discount on their natural gas and electricity bills. Will an increase of NorthWestern Energy customers receiving a low income discount result in a decrease in the benefit?

As the organizations formulate questions about LIEAP and policies impacting low income households, it may be appropriate to meet with you and your staff to discuss these issues. Such a meeting would allow for a sharing of information regarding the questions raised in this letter. Therefore, we would like to arrange a meeting of the various interested parties as soon as we can.

Sincerely,

Janet Robideau, Executive Director
Montana People's Action & Indian People's Action

Leon Ac Stalcup, Board Chair
Human Resources Council