

FILE

10-388-EX-550

Testimony for Public Hearing April 20, 2010

The CEI Fund Funds have been instrumental in providing financial assistance to consumers who are currently shut-off or in the disconnection process due to being unemployed or underemployed. Cleveland Housing Network is currently one of the administrators of the CEI fuel fund in the Cleveland and surrounding area.

During the past grant season one of our intake staff documented the following story:

Mr. W. arrived at our office from Seven Hills as a walk-in for HEAP. Mr. W., age 52, is married with four children. Mr. W. stated during the interview that he was self-employed as a realtor, and since the market collapsed, he has had to take on doing 'odd jobs' to help support his family—his wife is unemployed, they have four teenage sons, and they are struggling to keep their home. At the time of the interview, Mr. W. received a call on his cell. It was his wife informing him that a Field-Rep from CEI was at their home to disconnect their service at that moment.

Mr. W. was noticeably upset as he spoke. He bowed his head and spoke,  
*"I had a lot of business throughout the years, and never thought that I would be here. Due to the economy being bad, business is slow, and I did not meet the requirements to qualify for unemployment insurance. Now, I'm in a really bad place. My mortgage is past due, and despite my efforts to find a job, I haven't had a single callback. I've never thought I'd be the kind of person to have to apply for assistance, but here I am."*

We assured Mr. W. that he would be able to get assistance for his family. We enrolled him in PIPP, completed the HEAP application, and stopped the disconnection on his electric bill through the CEI FUEL FUND PROGRAM.

During program year 2009 which started, Sept 2009 CHN was able to provide assistance to 577 household throughout our target services area which totaled \$134,869.00 in emergency funds. As of today's date we have provided an additional \$45,632.00 to 196 households that did not qualify for the Winter Crisis program. Since the end of the Winter Crisis program on March 31, 2010, CHN HEAP Staff has processed an average of 15 applications each day. At the current rate we are expecting to have spent our 2010 grant allocations by the end of summer.

Utility expenses, electric, gas and water, continue to be challenging for people from all walks of life during these economic times. The fuel funding provided by First Energy needs to be a component of the long term solution. There will always be a need for additional resources beyond what the HEAP program provides.

Respectfully submitted,  
Liz Hernandez  
Property Services Director  
Cleveland Housing Network

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