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Low-income Arkansans to benefit from \$800,000 in energy assistance in Biden's infrastructure plan

by [Ryan Tarinelli](#) | January 31, 2022 at 7:06 a.m.



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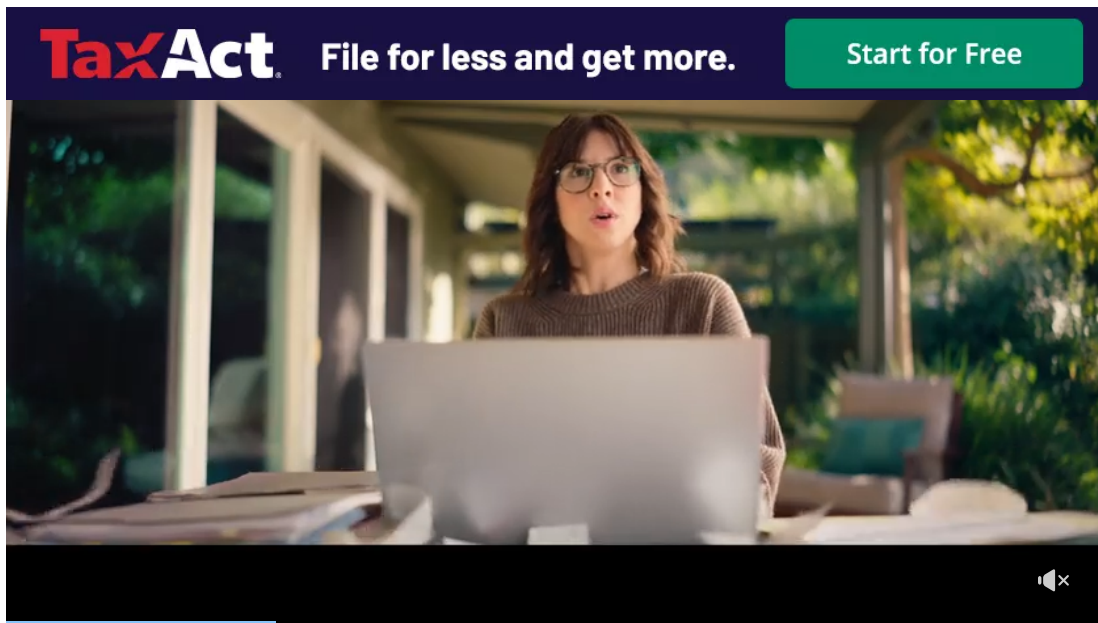
An American Standard Allegiance 15 air conditioning unit is hooked up and ready to replace the window air conditioning unit in this Aug. 8, 2008, file photo. (AP/Craig Ruttle)

WASHINGTON -- A federal infrastructure law is giving more than \$800,000 to Arkansas through a federal assistance program that helps low-income families with home energy costs, according to the U.S. Department of

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The funding is thanks to a wide-ranging federal infrastructure package signed by President Joe Biden last year, the passage of which capped off a major legislative win for his administration.

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The money is coming to Arkansas through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, which helps households with heating and cooling expenses, weatherization and crisis assistance. The decades-old program, known as LIHEAP, serves tens of thousands of households in Arkansas and has received a funding boost during the coronavirus pandemic, according to HHS.

Nationwide, states, tribes and territories are seeing \$100 million in LIHEAP funding from the infrastructure package, the HHS reported last week. The money is part of \$500 million included in the infrastructure law for the program, according to the department.

"Millions of working families are experiencing unusually high heating and cooling costs, and it is important that we provide them with the support they need," said HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra in a statement.

The consumer price index for household energy was up 11.6% in December compared to the same time the prior year, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.



The infrastructure bill cleared Congress last year without the support of Arkansas' all-Republican congressional delegation.

The infrastructure law funding is on top of other money pumped into the federal energy assistance program during the pandemic.

HHS reported Arkansas had been awarded more than \$30 million in energy assistance funding due to the American Rescue Plan. That money could be used in fiscal 2021 or 2022.

Federal lawmakers appropriated \$4.5 billion in supplemental funds through the pandemic relief package, according to the HHS.

Cecille Doan is with the Center for Arkansas Legal Services, a nonprofit law firm that offers free civil legal services to people with a low income.

Sometimes, the center's clients have applied for LIHEAP in the past and reported that the funding has run out, she said.

Many times, it's unexpected bills, like car troubles, that cause low-income residents to fall behind on their financial obligations, she said.

"It's the little debts that accumulate and snowball -- that's the problem," she said, noting the coronavirus pandemic has only made things worse for some people.

In fiscal 2020, more than 66,000 households in Arkansas were served by LIHEAP, according to HHS. Most of the \$44 million available to Arkansas went to crisis assistance, heating assistance and cooling assistance.

"Our job is to help low-income households maintain continuous, affordable and safe home heating and cooling services," Lanikque Howard, director of the office of community services at the Administration for Children & Families, said in a statement. The administration is a division of HHS.

The Arkansas Department of Energy and Environment oversees the distribution of program money in the state. Arkansas LIHEAP directly pays a utility company, according to the department.

A household might get a direct payment in cases in which utilities are included within the rent, the department said.

Print Headline: Low-income Arkansans to benefit from \$800,000 in energy assistance

Topics

Department of Health and Human Services, Arkansas, Joe Biden, U.S. Department of Energy, Department of Labor, Congress, Xavier Becerra



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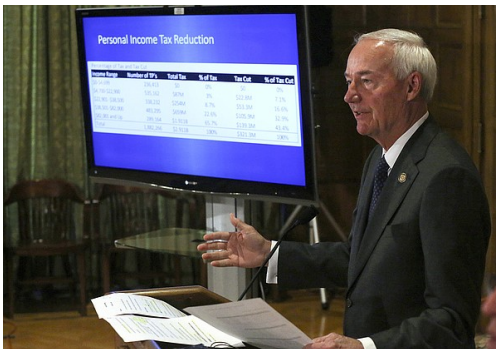


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