

# *An Overview of the Virgin Island's LIHEAP Program*

## **Administration**

The U.S. Virgin Islands Local Department of Human Services oversees the territory's LIHEAP program.

## **How the program works**

As set out in the LIHEAP statute, all U.S. territories receive a total of between .1 and .5 percent of the LIHEAP appropriation each year. As a rule, HHS provides .14 percent of the total to all territories. This amount is then divided between the territories based on population, with the Virgin Islands receiving approximately 3 percent of the amount allocated to territories.

Because federal LIHEAP funding is far from sufficient to meet its energy assistance needs, the Virgin Islands spends approximately \$10 in local funding for every \$1 it receives in LIHEAP assistance from the federal government.

The Virgin Islands runs a year-round energy assistance program. Because the USVI does not have distinct seasons, it does not differentiate between heating and cooling assistance. Households can apply for assistance as often as once every two months, and are eligible to receive up to \$500 per application, or \$3,000 per year.

## **Eligibility**

The Virgin Islands restricts program eligibility to households with incomes no greater than \$40,000 per year. Priority is given to seniors and people with disabilities. Approximately 72 percent of recipients are seniors.

## **Weatherization**

At this time, the Virgin Islands does not designate LIHEAP funding for weatherization.

## **Curtailment of Service**

The Virgin Islands does not impose a moratorium on utility shut-offs.

## **SGA and LIHEAP**

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is a block grant that provides resources to states and territories to help low-income families meet their energy assistance needs. Most Southern states rely on LIHEAP to assist low-income households -- working families with young children and senior citizens -- pay for their cooling and heating bills throughout the year.

LIHEAP is largely viewed by some members of Congress as a regional program, primarily intended to benefit cold weather states in the Northeast and Midwest. Its funding formula relies on data that is more than a quarter century out of date, and is skewed to disproportionately benefit states in these cold weather regions of the country.

SGA believes that Congress must view LIHEAP as a national program that assists families throughout the country with their overall energy needs. As such, SGA is working to achieve equity in the formula so Southern states will begin to receive a fair share of LIHEAP funding to better meet the needs of their low-income residents.

### **SGA Point of Contact**

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