

Jindal seeks funds to pay energy bills

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Gov. Bobby Jindal on Monday announced plans to divert \$10 million to help pay monthly electric bills for some low-income customers, according to a news release by the governor's office.

Jindal and state Public Service Commissioner Foster Campbell of Bossier Parish said in the prepared statement that \$10 million would be split between two programs: half would go weatherize homes and the other half would help an estimated 12,700 families pay their energy bills.

The PSC declared an "energy emergency" on Aug. 12 to invoke a little-used law that would allow some low-income senior citizens and others to postpone paying the sharp increases in their electric bills.

At the same time, Campbell asked Jindal to find some state money to help an existing federal program pay utility bills.

Jindal asked state Department of Natural Resources Secretary Scott Angelle to ask the U.S. Department of Energy to transfer money from a trust fund to two federally funded programs: the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, which is called LIHEAP, and the Weatherization Assistance Program, which is called WAP, according to the news release. The process should take a few weeks to complete.

"Through LIHEAP, families in desperate need right now can have the help they need to get through. With the weatherization program, the money invested in homes will cut costs and lower energy costs for years to come. Commissioner Campbell and I agree that the state must do its part to help those Louisiana families that cannot afford to pay their high utility bills this summer," Jindal said in the release.

The funds would come from the Petroleum Violation Escrow, which originated from old court settlements paid by oil companies to the federal government for violations of pricing regulations.

The Department of Natural Resources would transfer \$10 million in funds to the Louisiana Housing Finance Agency to be directed to the programs administered through the Louisiana Association of Community Action Partnerships.

DNR Secretary Angelle said, "It is appropriate at this time to help and protect our lowest-income families dealing with unprecedented energy costs by expanding the number of homes that can be reached by these programs."

LIHEAP provides assistance to low-income households by temporarily assisting in paying energy bills. WAP helps fund the weatherization of homes and improvements that offer long-term energy savings.

Both programs have income requirements for eligibility. Priority is given to families with children 5 years old and younger as well as elderly or disabled family members.