

# THE CINCINNATI POST



SCRIPPS HOWARD

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2007

DELAY SOUGHT ON GAS, ELECTRIC SHUTOFFS

## Gov: Don't pull plug on needy

By Lisa Cornwell  
Associated Press

Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland has asked state regulators to consider a moratorium on gas and electric utility disconnections this winter with families facing higher heating bill costs and tighter budgets.

The governor sent a letter Tuesday to the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio,

asking the commission to consider ordering a moratorium on gas and utility disconnections by utilities under PUCO's jurisdiction.

The governor noted that members of an Ohio family recently lost their lives in a fire blamed on candles the family had to light after their electricity was disconnected, leaving them without heat or power.

"I'm sure you agree that we need to do

everything we can possibly do to prevent this from happening again," the governor wrote to PUCO chairman Alan Schriber.

The commission will consider the governor's request at a regularly scheduled meeting today, PUCO spokeswoman Shana Eiselstein said Tuesday.

She said the last moratorium was put in

### Move applauded

► The governor's proposal, aimed at helping Ohioans who depend on gas and electricity for heat, has drawn support from at least two consumer advocate groups.

See **REQUEST** on 14A

# Request: Moratorium being sought on disconnections

From 1A

place in 2001 at the request of former Gov. Bob Taft when the state experienced record-low temperatures and a spike in natural gas prices.

The governor's action comes at a time when Ohio's emergency program providing federal money to help low-income, elderly and disabled residents pay their heating bills is already running low because of rising energy prices and high demand for assistance.

The Ohio Department of Development, which administers the state's allocation, already has shifted \$3 million from a summer program that helps pay cooling bills to the winter emergency program — increasing winter emergency funds from \$37 million to \$40 million, department spokeswoman Nikki Jaworski said.

"We are seeing a strain on the system overall," Jaworski said. "We're over the halfway point in terms of the number we served last year, but we aren't at the halfway point of the season yet."

The heating assistance program runs from Nov. 1 through March 31, and Jaworski said that the agency already has spent \$21 million for 75,000 applicants approved for the winter emergency program. Last year, \$37 million was spent to help 140,000.

One of the local programs that re-

ceives some of the federal allocation is the Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency. It already has spent \$900,000 of the \$1.2 million allocated for this winter's emergency fund, said Herbert Walker, who manages the agency's emergency heating assistance program.

"We've already processed about 4,000 applications out of 6,000 who applied, and we aren't even into the really cold weather yet," Walker said.

He said about 9,000 people qualified for the emergency assistance last year.

Ohio residents who use propane or fuel oil have really been hit hard as prices have increased about 30 percent, Jaworski said.

"We almost had a crisis in Columbiana County because vendors of those fuels are not accepting anything but the full payment upfront," Jaworski said.

She said the maximum amount an applicant could receive from the emergency fund was raised from \$450 to \$600 to help applicants get at least a half-tank of fuel on a one-time basis.

Ohio Partners for Affordable Energy and the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel both endorsed his plan.

"The request would prioritize consumers' need for heat at a time when they are strapped with so many rising costs," Ohio Consumers' Counsel Janine Migden-Ostrander said.

