

Question: My parents are on a fixed income with the bulk of their funds coming from Social Security. With the cost of everything from groceries, gas for their car, to the power bill increasing every month they are having a hard time making ends meet. Are there any programs out there to help them?

Answer: Across the country people are feeling the pinch of the sluggish economy and the record rise in the cost of fuel. As the primary advocate for seniors in South Carolina, I have been very concerned about the stories I am hearing from my constituents and their families who are struggling during these challenging times.

There are several programs in place to help our seniors in everything from rental assistance to utility bills and meal programs. One of these programs is run through the Office on Aging and provides emergency rental assistance for low income seniors.

Since the program started in August of 2005 nearly 900 individuals have applied for emergency rental assistance and as of March 2008, we have provide 678 individuals (unduplicated) with funds that have prevented or at least delayed eviction procedures. Rental assistance helps seniors get through "tough times" and allows them to get back on their feet financially. Often just by buying a little extra time provides the opportunity needed to obtain assistance form family and friends or other sources that keeps them form essentially becoming homeless.

The program is funded through a grant awarded by the South Carolina Housing and Development Authority to administer an emergency rental assistance program throughout the state for persons age 60 and older who are at 120 percent of the federal poverty level or below.

Funding for the emergency rental assistance program is limited. Assistance is given on a first-come, first-served basis. All applicants must complete an application and provide proper documentation and identification. To apply, contact Lee Myall in the Lt. Governor's Office on Aging in Columbia at 1-800-868-9095 or (803) 734-9900 (Columbia local calling area).

In addition to getting help with their rent if they meet the program's guidelines, individuals who call in may also be referred to an Information Referral and Assistance Specialist in their region. The IR&A Specialists will try to determine why a senior is having difficulty paying his or her rent and other expenses, and can provide information and counseling about other sources of help or support available for them.

The goal of the emergency rental assistance program is to meet the immediate need for shelter and also provide long term stability for the senior. The following are guidelines for the program:

- Assistance will be given to eligible persons 60 years of age and older.
- Eligible households may have an income of 120 percent of the poverty level.
- Applicant must be on the lease.
- Property manager/landlord information must be supplied on the application.
- Eligible households can receive three month's rent up to a maximum of \$1,000.
- Payments are made directly to the landlord.

For more information on the Emergency Rental Assistance program or the Lt. Governor's Office on Aging visit our website www.aging.sc.gov or call 800-868-9095 and a member of my staff will be happy to help you.