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Contact: Betsy Clayton, APR/CPRC
Communications Director
Lee County Government
239-826-4606
bclayton@leegov.com

**Lee Commissioners accept \$2.8 million for water utility assistance for low-income households
Additional dollars also added to energy-assistance program**

Fort Myers, FL, Aug. 2, 2022 – The Lee Board of County Commissioners voted Tuesday to accept about \$2.8 million from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity for the Low Income Home Water Assistance Program to assist households with water and wastewater costs.

The funds will be used through September 2023 to assist households countywide – including those within municipalities – to prevent disconnection of service. The program will help with past-due water and/or wastewater bills for households with an income at or below 150% of the federal poverty level. For a family of four, for example, the maximum annual household income to be eligible for assistance is \$48,646.

The Low Income Home Water Assistance Program is new for Lee County. Staff estimates about 3,790 households will be helped. It represents another program through which county commissioners are infusing federal and state funds to residents in need.

Commissioners also voted Tuesday to accept about \$1 million in additional funding from Florida Department of Economic Opportunity for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program to assist households with electric costs or to prevent disconnections of electric services.

This is an existing and ongoing program, but with the additional dollars approved Tuesday, staff estimates about 1,950 households will receive assistance. Qualifying households must have an income at or below 150% of the federal poverty level and must have not received Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program assistance in the past 12 months.

For both programs, the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity funds are available due to the American Rescue Plan Act.

Beginning Aug. 15, people can begin applying two ways:

- Online: Go to www.leegov.com/dhs/assistance/financial.
- Paper applications: Pick up at Lee County Human & Veteran Services, 2440 Thompson St., Fort Myers, FL 33901. Weather-proof bins on the building's exterior hold the applications, and a secured drop-box is there for those who would like to return applications without having to mail them.

Note: In addition to the new countywide water assistance program, Lee County Utilities (LCU) has its own longstanding hardship program for customers. LCU is one of about a dozen providers of water and wastewater services within Lee County. LCU customers must meet the definition of low, very low, or extremely low income as defined by the State of Florida's Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guidelines at the time of application. For more information, see the Customer Service Manual here: www.leegov.com/utilities/customer-resource-center

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