

ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE TO HIGH ENERGY-BURDENED AND LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS IN GEORGIA

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1. Federal Programs

Several federal programs provide assistance to high energy-burdened and low-income households, including those summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of low-income household assistance programs at the federal level

Program	Federal Programs with State Implementation	Eligibility	Assistance/Provision
Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP)	In Georgia, the Weatherization Assistance Program is administered by the Division of Energy Resources at the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA), which in turn provides grants to 14 local agencies to provide weatherization services.	200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) or 60% State Median Income Preference to people over 60 years of age, families with one or more members with a disability, with children, with a high energy burden and high energy usage	Grants to help weatherize the low-income households in crisis situation
Weatherization Readiness Fund	WRF is administered by the Division of Energy Resources at the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA).	Created in the US FY22 budget, where it received \$15M in funding.	Services rendered by the WRF may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • roof repair, • wall repair (interior or exterior), • ceiling repair, • floor repair, • foundation or subspace repair, • exterior drainage repairs (e.g., landscaping or gutters), • plumbing repairs, • electrical repair,

- clean-up or remediation beyond typical scope of WAP,
- lead paint, asbestos (confirmed or suspected, including vermiculite), mold and/or moisture

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)/ Office of Community Service	150% of the Federal Poverty Level	Direct compensation funded by block grants
Energy Efficiency and Conservation Loan Program (EECLP)	Rural Utilities Service for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)	Rural electric co-ops that serve no more than 20,000 residents	Loans to finance EE and conservation programs
Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Program	U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD)/IRS		Funding for construction and retrofit practices of public housing

The focus of DOE's Weatherization Assistance program is to increase energy efficiency, reduce the energy expenditures, and improve the health and safety of the dwellings occupied by vulnerable population. This includes low-income people, households with elderly or disabled person, families with children, and high energy burden households. The grants received from WAP are further distributed to the local weatherization agencies by the state. WAP broadly covers insulation, air filtration, baseload energy use, and energy and energy-efficient appliances for the household in crisis. A typical service includes advanced diagnostic and computerized assessment to identify cost effective solutions which is then followed by installation, inspection and audit.

The LIHEAP, launched in the 70's, in response to the increase in the price of utility bills during the period is a bill assistance program. It provides direct compensation for some of the energy costs for low-income households that are unable to pay the bills. The program operates by

giving block grants to the grantees to help low-income families in need. The grantees are in turn required to submit annual reports to the governing agencies. The assistance includes essential heating and essential cooling for families with the lowest of incomes and relatively high energy bills. Lack of awareness about such programs and the confusion over application is one reason for low enrolment in LIHEAP (Treadway, 2018).

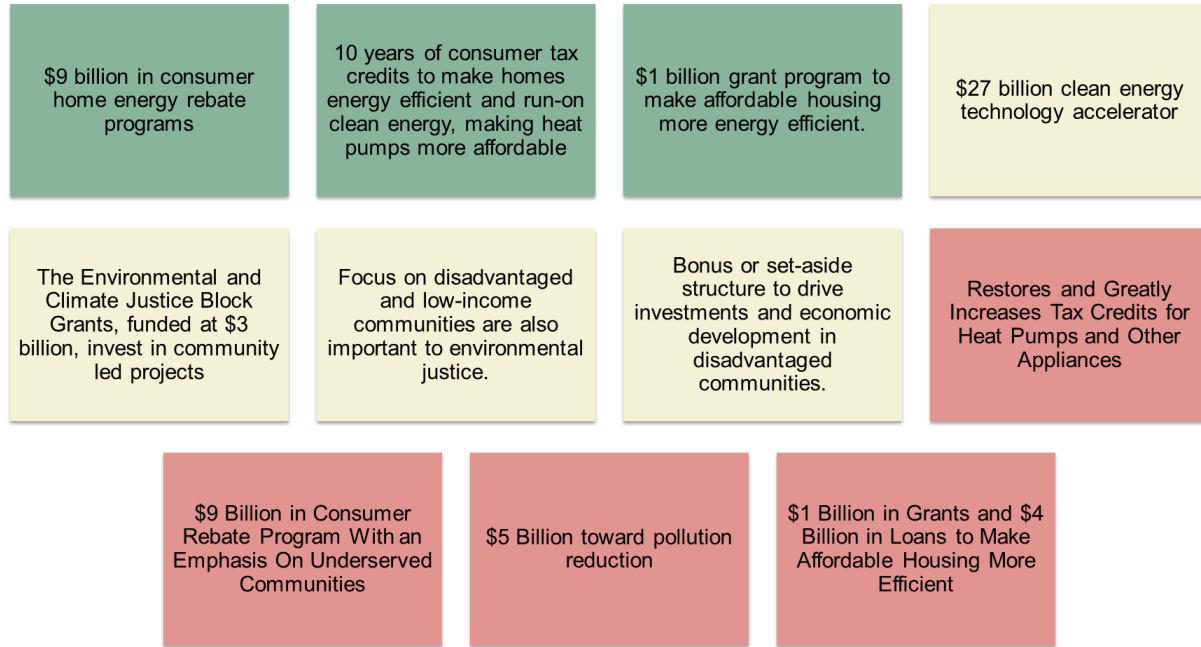
Under the EECLP operated by USDA, eligible utilities can borrow money tied to Treasury rates of interest and use the funds to improve energy efficiency programs or encourage the use of renewable energy fuels as well as for audits, community awareness, and outreach, and consumer education.

The federal government spends about \$6 billion annually on the LIHTC program, which has supported more than 2 million housing units to date.¹ Three recent federal appropriations bills have added substantial infusions of funding to several of these programs (See Figure 1. for details). These programs support Justice40 initiatives and could significantly reduce the energy burden of Black households in Georgia and Atlanta.

¹https://betterbuildingssolutioncenter.energy.gov/sites/default/files/PP_Incorporate%20EE%20RE%20Standards%20as%20a%20Criterion%20in%20Tax%20Credits_FINAL_3.pdf

Figure 1 Summary of Selected Recent Federal Appropriations

a. Inflation Reduction Act



b. Infrastructure Investment Job Act and American Rescue Plan Act

Additional Federal Policy Support	
Infrastructure Investment Job Act	American Rescue Plan Act
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$3.5 Billion in the Weatherization Assistance Program • \$550 Billion in Low Income Energy Assistance Program • \$550 Billion for Energy Efficiency Conservation Block Grant • \$500 Million State Energy Program • \$250 New Energy Efficiency Revolving Loan Fund 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$350 Billion Coronavirus State and Fiscal Recovery Funds; State Local and Tribal Governments • Spending decisions must be made by end of 2024 and money spent by end of 2026 • As of 7/12/22 out of the 329 local governments, only 40.8% of SLFRF have been budgeted • Only 67% of funds have been allocated to States and Territories are estimated to have been allocated of 6/3/22

2. State programs

The local low-income energy programs often also focus on economic development, job creation, and meeting the sustainability goals for the community. A snapshot of several relevant state programs can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Georgia’s low-income household assistance programs

State program	Type	Georgia Example
Minimum requirements for Low-income Energy Programs	State public utility commissions set minimum spending or savings requirements for their low-income energy-efficiency programs	–
Adders to Cost-Effectiveness Tests for Low-Income Energy Programs	Preferential treatment to low-income energy programs by exempting the programs entirely from cost-effectiveness tests	–
Weatherize campaigns	Supported by loan and rebate programs to overcome market barriers and accelerate adoption of EE programs in the rural areas	–

3. Local programs

Several Georgia programs operating at the local level are designed to help low-income households or households facing high energy burdens. These are either i) federally funded programs run by the state counterparts or ii) run in collaboration between the utility provider and a non-profit or iii) run by the utility provider alone. LIHEAP, WAP are type i) programs that are federally funded, follow federal poverty guidelines and are run by state offices e.g., WAP is administered in GA by Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA).

One significant barrier for these programs is that many require an online application. Low-income households usually lack access to broadband facilities that can enable them to make use of such assistive program. Another barrier is that some of the programs are very specifically available only to homeowners; the one's that allow renters also need consent from their landlords.

Table 3. Summary of Georgia's local low-income household assistance programs

Local program	Type	Georgia Example
Energy and Affordable Housing initiatives	Emergency assistance programs by NGO's through philanthropic and other funding	Project SHARE is an emergency on-bill assistance program for low-income households in urgent need. The Salvation Army runs it with significant contributions coming from Georgia Power on behalf of its customers (In 2019, Georgia Power and its customers donated \$1.8 million to Project SHARE).
	Senior assistance and efficiency programs	This program by Georgia Power provides up to \$24 discount for each metered month for income-qualified customers above 65 years of age.
	Donation of efficient equipment	A program run by the local food bank hands over 'Energy Efficient Kits' once a month to any resident regardless of income. This kit kickstarts your energy efficiency upgrades by providing small replacement devices like LED bulbs, water saving bathroom faucet and showerhead etc.

Local program	Type	Georgia Example
	Provision of Health and Safety measures	Since 2021, WeatherRISE ATL - provides \$3,500,000 to help energy burdened and income-qualified owner-occupied single-family households in Atlanta with health and safety measures
Rooftop Solar Power Programs	Helps make solar affordable by allowing individuals to buy solar equipment in bulk	“Solarize Atlanta” which is backed by nonprofits and Atlanta’s Office of Resiliency

4 Utility Practices – Billing assistance and Energy Efficiency Programs

Best practices for utilities involve (1) appropriating a minimum level of rate revenues on low-income energy-efficiency programs, and (2) using special cost-effectiveness testing and provisions that give extra credit for low-income energy-efficiency accomplishments. Georgia does not have either of these policies. The share of utility residential energy-efficiency funding that supports low-income households is lower than the percent of residential utility customers who are low-income (Drehobl and Castro-Alvarez, 2017). Georgia does not have either of these practices.

Table 4 Utility low-income energy programs

Program	Description	Georgia Practices
Ratepayer-funded Low-income Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programs to support low-income households through ratepayer resources are proposed under the IRP - The GA Public Service Commission (PSC) is usually the reviewing authority and these IRP's are typically written every three years - The Georgia PSC performs the goals setting and the cost-effectiveness test (e.g., Rate Impact Measure, Total Resource Cost test, Societal Test) 	<p>Georgia Power operates HEEAP (Home Energy Efficiency Assistance), a 'direct install' program, that promotes energy efficiency improvements in income-qualified households. It also supports Project Share.</p>
Hopeworks	<p>Home energy efficiency improvements for senior citizens</p>	<p>Income qualified senior citizens (above the age of 60 years) can apply for free home energy efficiency improvements. The services can include air sealing, attic insulation, duct sealing, LED light bulb upgrades and floor insulation</p>
Residential On-Bill Program Designs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilities can make use of this financing design to incentivize the energy efficiency improvement projects for low-income customers - Utility pays the upfront costs and the customers repay the amount through their utility bill savings - This design helps overcome the liquidity and budget constraints for the household 	<p>RISE pilot (Residential Investment to Save Energy), operated by Georgia Power is one such on-bill financing program that allows eligible households to pay-off their energy efficiency upgrades through the achieved monthly utility bill savings</p>
Donation model	<p>A certified program designed to serve low-income customers with additional funding from a donation model</p>	
Round-up Assistance Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -These voluntary programs give a chance of donation to the customers by rounding up their utility bills to the next whole dollar amount -The extra money is used for other customers in need or for community based programs - These programs are prominent with municipal and local cooperative utilities and operate either on an opt-in or opt-out basis 	<p>Northwest Georgia Electric Membership Cooperative's (NGEMC) Round-up Program has awarded annual grants to individuals, families and communities in need totalling more than \$100,000 each year since</p>

Prepaid Electric Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Prepaid services such as prepaid gift cards, transit cards, pay-as-you-go cell phones, and pre-loaded credit cards allow the customers to manage and budget their expenditures in advance -Appealing to the low-income customers as it does not need a deposit like the postpaid services -Smart meters and Digital meters make the prepaid services appealing, as they reduce the response time and disconnection time for the utilities 	-
Payment Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -This plan allows the customers to pay their utility bill arrears over time -The customers need to provide a down payment, pay a minimum amount of the bill monthly and then can pay the debt over a predetermined number of months 	-
Disconnection Alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Short-term alternatives for the low-income households during the energy efficiency revamping phase -Reduces the costs associated with shut-off and disconnection 	-

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