

Assistance to pay power bills reduced for Nevadans

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Thousands of Nevada residents who rely on financial assistance to pay their power bills likely won't get help this year because of federal funding cuts, a state agency reported Tuesday.

Miki Allard, staff specialist with the Division of Welfare and Supportive Services, said federal funding for Nevada's Energy Assistance Program will amount to \$4 million this year, down from \$15.8 million in the fiscal year that ended June 30.

While the funding provided by Nevada utility customers through the universal energy charge on their bills will remain relatively steady at \$8.7 million, the anticipated decline in federal assistance has forced the agency to reduce both eligibility levels and the amount of assistance that can be provided, she said.

The income threshold for eligibility this year will be 110 percent of poverty levels, compared to 150 percent last year, Allard said. Thousands of Nevadans will lose eligibility because of this change.

The amount of support will also be reduced to about \$500 this year compared to \$860 a year ago.

The reductions come as demand has increased, from 21,900 households being helped in fiscal year 2009, to 27,500 in fiscal year 2010 and 32,600 households last fiscal year.

"These cuts in federal funding will have a significant effect on Nevada families struggling with the highest unemployment rate in the nation," Romaine Gilliland, administrator for the

Division of Welfare and Supportive Services, said. "For many families the assistance we are able to provide will not be enough to keep the lights on."