OREGON ENERGY FUND PROVIDES ENERGY ASSISTANCE FOR HOUSEHOLDS IMPACTED BY COVID-19

PORTLAND, OR: Oregon Energy Fund (OEF) has announced new measures to support Oregonians who are struggling to pay their household energy bills due to loss of work following the spread of COVID-19. These steps include releasing its annual round of statewide funding nearly three months early and transitioning from in-person to remote applications whenever possible. OEF has also launched an emergency COVID-19 relief fund and is seeking donations from the public to support families impacted by the outbreak.

“Early surveys show that 1 in 5 households nationwide have lost work because of the coronavirus outbreak,” said OEF Executive Director Brian Allbritton. “While eviction moratoriums and suspensions of utility disconnections are a welcome step, these actions will not prevent families from accruing charges at a time when their income has been wiped out. Energy assistance funds will help ensure Oregonians don’t have to sacrifice meals, medicine, or other necessities to pay their bills in this hour of need. Furthermore, private donations can be applied more quickly and with more flexibility than federal dollars, allowing funds to be available immediately for families who have been thrown into crisis.”

1 in 4 Oregon households were “energy burdened” last year, with thousands spending up to 25% of their annual income on energy. With the sudden and intense surge of unemployment caused by COVID-19, however, the number of energy burdened households is anticipated to rise dramatically, with wages dropping as household energy use rises. Such utility hardship has been linked to pneumonia, heart disease, arthritis, depression, diabetes, food insecurity, debt, and homelessness, exacerbating the very conditions that make certain populations more vulnerable to the virus.

OEF distributes funds in partnership with a network of community-based agencies around the state. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, OEF and its partners are updating application protocols to reduce the risk of community spread and make it easier for clients to apply remotely for help.

In anticipation of the expected increase in energy assistance requests, OEF has also expedited its next funding cycle from October to late summer. OEF has also created an emergency relief fund and is requesting donations from the public to meet the high level of need. Donations can be made at www.oregonenergyfund.org/relief. Oregon residents who are in need of energy assistance are encouraged to visit www.oregonenergyfund.org/energy-assistance to learn how to apply.

About Oregon Energy Fund: Oregon Energy Fund is Oregon’s leading energy assistance nonprofit. Founded in 1989, OEF has since helped more than 300,000 Oregonians pay their bills in times of crisis, supplying a basic need that prevents illness, hunger, and homelessness, and gives children and adults the support to lead healthy and productive lives. Last year, OEF programs provided emergency funds to more than 3,000 Oregonians, including 1,032 children, 480 seniors, and 472 individuals with disabilities.