Be UtilityWise ERIE

2026

Building Connections to Affordability: Collaborative Strategies for Lasting Change



Ambassador Conference Center
7794 Peach St., Erie, PA 16509

Building Connections to Affordability: Collaborative Strategies for Lasting Change

Registration
8:30 - 9 a.m. | Salon 1

Welcome & Special Remarks
9 - 9:15 a.m. | Salon 1

Standing In Their Shoes:
Pennsylvania Area Health Education Center
Poverty Simulation
9:15 - 11:15 a.m. | Salon 4

Break
11:15 - 11:30 a.m.

GECAC "With Erie - For Erie"
11:30 a.m. - Noon | Salon 1

Winter Energy Pricing & Regulatory Insights
Noon - 12:30 p.m. | Salon 1

Lunch & Networking
12:30 - 1:30 p.m. | Salon 1

Scams All Around Us: Don't Take the Bait
1:30 - 2:15 p.m. | Salon 1

Utility Assistance Programs & LIHEAP
Check Your Knowledge Q&A
2:15 - 3:00 p.m. | Salon 1

Complete Program Evaluation Form
Closing & Raffle
3 - 3:30 p.m. | Salon 1

AGENDA

8:30 - 9 a.m. **Registration & Breakfast**

9 - 9:15 a.m. **Welcome & Special Remarks**
Session in Salon 1

Christina Chase-Pettis, Sr. Communications Specialist, PAPUC

9:15 - 11:15 a.m. **Standing In Their Shoes: Pennsylvania Area Health Education Center Poverty Simulation**
Session in Salon 4

Dr. Lynne Williams, Exec. Director, SW PA Health Education Center

This interactive simulation puts participants in the shoes of low-income families - including TANF recipients, individuals with disabilities, and seniors relying on Social Security - as they work within family units to secure food, shelter, and healthcare on a limited budget. Throughout the session, participants interact with community "stations" representing human service agencies, grocers, pawnbrokers, bill collectors, job interviewers, and police officers, navigating the same barriers many families face each month. The experience builds awareness of the systemic challenges facing low-income families and sparks meaningful discussion about community-level change. It's especially valuable for professionals who regularly work with low-income populations, as well as policymakers and community leaders working to address the structural barriers that keep families cycling through poverty. A debrief discussion follows, giving participants space to reflect on the experience and its broader implications.

11:15 - 11:30 a.m. **Break** *(Please return to Salon 1 for remaining sessions)*

11:30 a.m. - Noon **GECAC "With Erie - For Erie"**

Dr. Benjamin Wilson, CEO, GECAC
Matt Trott, COO, Aging, GECAC

The Greater Erie Community Action Committee (GECAC) is dedicated to lifting individuals out of poverty in Erie, PA. This session will explore how GECAC integrates aging services, adult education, and economic stability programs with digital tools such as **PA-Navigate** and **PA-CareKit**. Attendees will learn how these resources help connect residents with essential services, including housing, food, employment, and community support, fostering a more stable and empowered community.A debrief discussion follows, giving participants space to reflect on the experience and its broader implications.

Noon - 12:30 p.m. **Winter Energy Pricing & Regulatory Insights**

Dan Mumford, Director, Office of Competitive Market Oversight, PAPUC

This PUC regulatory update will include important information about utility imposters, service termination rules, and what winter heating costs look like as we enter the heating season. Dan will also discuss the increasing cost of electricity, why prices have been going up, and what to expect in the future.

12:30 - 1:30 p.m. **Lunch & Networking**

1:30 - 2:15 p.m. **Scams All Around Us: Don't Take the Bait**

Mary Bach, AARP Pennsylvania Volunteer, Chair Consumer Issues Task Force

Many consumers, especially seniors, possess homes, income, and savings, making them prime targets for criminals. Scammers impersonate government officials, businesses, and even loved ones to exploit vulnerabilities. AARP Consumer Advocate Mary Bach will provide awareness and offer tips on recognizing and protecting yourself from scams. Remember, if you can spot a scam, you can stop it!

2:15 - 3:00 p.m. **Utility Assistance Programs & LIHEAP Check Your Knowledge Q&A**

Virgil Kennedy, Business Analyst Human Services, FirstEnergy

Jacquelyn Beardsley, Senior Program Coordinator, National Fuel
Alexa Mapstone, Outreach & Education Coordinator and CARES Representative, Columbia Gas
Tamara Ganzer, Income Maintenance Casework Supervisor and LIHEAP Coordinator, Erie County Assistance Office

Join us for an engaging session focused on the Utility Assistance and Weatherization programs. Utility representatives will share valuable insights and assistance resources, share conservation strategies, and answer questions about their offered programs. This session will also deliver the latest program guidelines, eligibility requirements, application process and any changes to benefits to ensure understanding and access to the LIHEAP This session will feature an interactive Q&A game designed to enhance your understanding of Utility Assistance Programs and guidelines. Get ready to learn and engage!

3 - 3:30 p.m. **Complete Program Evaluation Form Closing & Raffle**

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/59DJRH6

Please complete your evaluation.
Your feedback is important to us!

Special Thanks

DR. LYNNE WILLIAMS



Lynne Williams, MD PhD, is an Internal Medicine-Pediatrics physician in an FQHC primary care office and serves as the Executive Director of the Southwest PA Area Health Education Center (AHEC).

She works to improve primary care in medically underserved areas through networking, education and training programs. As part of a strong desire to protect vulnerable children and promote the health and development of all children, she is a co-founder of Jeremiah's Place, the first crisis nursery in the Pittsburgh area.

The Be Utility Wise Committee thanks Dr. Williams for hosting and presenting Standing In Their Shoes: Pennsylvania Area Health Education Center Poverty Simulation.

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Guest Speaker

MARY BACH



Mary Bach is a long-time, nationally recognized, independent Consumer Advocate. As a volunteer, she is also Chair of the AARP Pennsylvania Consumer Issues Task Force.

A former high school teacher, Mary was elected Murrysville Councilwoman for four years, and then elected Franklin Regional School Board Member for eight years. She has numerous television and radio credits, including appearances on the "Today Show," "Good Morning America," "Donahue," and "Dateline," as well as many segments on local TV programs and talk-radio shows. She has been a featured speaker or workshop presenter at numerous state, national, and international conferences on a wide variety of consumer issues. She appears monthly on ABC27's "GoodDayPA" in Harrisburg, PA, providing the FraudWatch segments, and weekends doing the "FraudWatch Minute." She is also a frequent guest on "Focus on Aging Adults" on PCN-TV.

Mary has been on the forefront of telemarketing issues, from the consumer's perspective. She is Vice President of the Scanning Certification Advisory Board, helping to set industry standards for retail pricing accuracy at the checkout. She has had Governor's appointments to three statewide committees. She is now in her third term as a member of the PUC's Consumer Advisory Council, representing the general public. She was honored as 1999 National Consumer of the Year at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., and also has received the Jefferson Award Bronze Medal. In 2004, she was awarded AARP's prestigious Andres Award, the organization's highest honor for community service. In 2006, the Pennsylvania Association of Weights and Measures named their annual consumer award after her, "The Mary Bach Consumer of the Year Award," for her efforts in promoting marketplace fairness. In 2016, she received the AARP "Ethel Award for Community Outreach." In 2018, she was honored by AARP nationally as one of 12 "Superstar Volunteers" and was the recipient of the AARP 2018 National Trailblazer Award. In 2019, she was honored with the Westinghouse SURE Lifetime Achievement Award. Mary is the mother of two, and the grandmother of four. She resides in Murrysville, PA.

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Committee Members

Christina Chase-Pettis, PAPUC
Shari A. Williams, PAPUC
Jacquelyn Beardsley, National Fuel
Christina Kessler, GECAC
Matt Trott, GECAC
Virgil Kennedy, FirstEnergy
Alexa Mapstone, Columbia Gas

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