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SHELD Participates in Emergency Broadband Benefit Program

South Hadley, Mass. July 30, 2021– South Hadley Electric Light Department (SHELD) is now participating in the federal Emergency Broadband Benefit Program, aimed at reducing COVID impacts on those who may be struggling financially.

SHELD has signed on to the program, which is administered through the Federal Communications Commission. Qualifying SHELD customers receive a \$50 credit on their monthly bill for Fibersonic, the light department's own GIG speed internet service. Fibersonic is normally \$74.99 per month.

The Emergency Broadband Benefit Program is open to customers of participating internet providers meeting certain established criteria. The criteria, set by the federal government, include income thresholds, participation in certain assistance programs, or substantial loss of income due to job loss or furlough during the pandemic. The program aligns well with SHELD's board of commissioners' interest in exploring ways to assist underserved and low income customers.

"It's something that is available, and we wanted our customers to be able to take advantage," said SHELD Marketing and Customer Service Manager Kelly Frazier. "This is a way to help our customers who were negatively impacted by COVID-19."

SHELD customers who have been approved for the program received their first credit in July. The federal program will be available to qualifying SHELD customers until the funding runs out, or until six months after the Health and Human Services Department ends the current COVID public health emergency declaration.

SHELD, meanwhile, is swiftly moving ahead with its popular Fibersonic program. The deployment is about 50% constructed, and the light department expects to be about 60% built out by the end of the year.

"We have 1,100 Fibersonic customers, with no end in sight," Frazier said. "There's been a lot of satisfaction with the service; we're getting applications every single day."

For more information on the program, eligibility, and to apply, visit fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit, or click on the link on the SHELD Fibersonic website, www.fibersonic.com.

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