



For Immediate Release

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Couleecap Launches Solar Energy and Weatherization Pilot Project to Address Energy Poverty in Wisconsin

Couleecap has announced a new pilot project to integrate advanced energy conservation technologies, such as solar and air source heat pumps, into existing weatherization programs to further reduce energy costs for low-income households in Wisconsin. A Couleecap-owned rental property on 8th Street South in La Crosse is one of two pilot sites. The second pilot site is being identified in partnership with the Monroe County Housing Authority.

The project is funded by the Wisconsin Department of Administration Division of Energy, Housing, and Community Resources, Renew Wisconsin Solar for Good, Focus on Energy, Ethos Green Power Cooperative, and a Friend of Couleecap. Results from the pilot project will be used to inform state Weatherization Assistance Program plans.

“Households with the lowest incomes are paying significant amounts of their income on energy bills,” says Hetti Brown, Couleecap Executive Director. “Yet you rarely hear that energy poverty is an urgent need to be addressed. We have the tools to tackle this issue – weatherization programs, when paired with low-cost and highly efficient energy sources, can make a large difference to households across the state.”

Governor Tony Evers has made initiatives to address poverty and energy sustainability a priority for his administration. “Energy efficiency is key to lowering costs for Wisconsinites and their families, especially as folks are feeling the squeeze with rising costs today due to national inflation. The Couleecap initiative is a great example of how we can invest in clean, made-in-Wisconsin energy to lower energy bills while creating good-paying job opportunities in innovative industries,” said Gov. Evers. “As we continue working to support new paths toward clean energy that also reduce energy bills in Wisconsin, I’m glad to be supporting this pilot project that will help lower costs for working families across our state so they can make ends meet and rest a little easier.”

The Renew Wisconsin Solar for Good program donated the solar panels for the project. Sam Dunaiski, Distributed Resources Director for Renew Wisconsin explained, “Solar for Good grants spur renewable energy adoption among mission-based nonprofits in Wisconsin, including organizations that provide affordable housing. This grant will help Couleecap residents gain



access to clean, renewable energy and allow them to save money on their utility bills. Onsite solar is a big part of our transition to a carbon-free economy and an essential component of Wisconsin's equitable energy future.”

The pilot project focuses on multi-unit apartment buildings, owned by nonprofit housing providers, that provide housing to income-eligible tenants. The Weatherization Assistance Program, free to the same tenants, makes health and safety improvements to homes and improves how residences function to conserve heat and energy consumption. Measures include air duct sealing, wall and attic insulation, heating system replacements, and repairing/replacing inefficient appliances. This results in cost savings for the residents and less energy used in Wisconsin overall.

Even with these measures, energy burden is still high for low-income residents. According to the Low-Income Energy Affordability Data Tool, La Crosse County households living below the Federal Poverty Rate (FPR) pay 12% of their income on energy as compared to only 4% paid by households making at least 200% FPR. In Monroe County, the comparison is 16% vs. 4%, respectively. Residents most impacted by poverty are elderly, disabled, and racially or ethnically diverse residents.

The pilot site announced in La Crosse is expected to save residents up to \$9528 annually combined, or up to \$1191 per unit, on energy costs. The State of WI is projected to save up to \$34,500 over a 10-year period in energy assistance payments.

“This just makes sense. If we can reduce the need of people to rely on long-term energy assistance by making, instead, a one-time investment to improve their financial stability while conserving energy, why wouldn't we do it? We want to build a model that can be scaled statewide,” says Brown.

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About Couleecap

Couleecap, Inc. is a private non-profit 501c3 charitable organization. Couleecap helps people in need with housing food, transportation, and more. Created in 1966, we are a community action program that fights poverty and promotes self-sufficiency in Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon counties. Couleecap is a member of the Community Action Network, originally created in 1964. Learn more at couleecap.org.