

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 7, 2010

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to thank you for your support of energy assistance for low-income families and to request that you utilize funding from the recently enacted Consolidated Appropriations Act to further aid financially-strapped households in paying their energy bills. As you know, \$5.1 billion was provided for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) in Fiscal Year 2010 – the highest funding level in the history of the program. This appropriation includes more than \$590 million in LIHEAP contingency funding. We urge you to release these resources as soon as possible to address the needs of families and seniors who are struggling in the current economic crisis. In addition, we ask that you dedicate sufficient funds for this program in your Fiscal Year 2011 budget request.

More families are in need of and receiving LIHEAP benefits than ever before. According to the National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA), states assisted more than 8 million households last year, nearly a one-third increase over Fiscal Year 2008. Furthermore, NEADA anticipates a 20 percent increase in LIHEAP applications this year. Even at the record appropriations levels passed by Congress the last two years, demand for the LIHEAP program continues to exceed funding. Accordingly, states will be able to spend contingency funding immediately.

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Act of 1981 instructs that the LIHEAP contingency fund be used assist the *"needs of one or more States arising from a natural disaster or other emergency."* The law states that economic conditions, such as increased unemployment and layoffs, as well increased participation in public benefits such as food stamps, merit the release of LIHEAP contingency funds. Clearly these conditions have been met. The most recent USDA food stamp data indicates that a record 37 million people – approximately one in eight Americans – received food stamps in September. Moreover, many states have experienced unemployment rates that have exceeded the national average for several months. In releasing these funds, we urge you to give consideration to targeting assistance based on economic conditions, as well as extreme weather events.

Releasing emergency LIHEAP funding – supplementing block grant funding already being spent in every state – will help thousands of families and seniors with their energy bills, and in doing so, create a noticeable economic multiplier. Less burdened by energy bills, these low-income families have more to spend on other essentials, and can avoid the choice between paying energy bills and putting food on their table.

Due to the clear economic benefit and demonstrated need, we also urge you to include full funding for LIHEAP in your Fiscal Year 2011 budget request, the same level that Congress has provided over the last two years.

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For many years, LIHEAP has been a vital safety net for low-income families and seniors. In these tough economic times, the program is more important than ever. As such, we respectfully request that you release LIHEAP funding to meet the immediate, emergency needs, and urge you to maintain the federal commitment to low-income energy assistance.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,