

August 31, 2015

The Honorable Harold Rogers  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-305, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1016 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1016 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Lowey, Chairman Cole, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As Congress develops a continuing resolution (CR) for the start of the 2016 fiscal year, the Coalition of Northeastern Governors (CONEG) urges you to ensure that the maximum funding level is provided for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) within the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations bill. Specifically, we ask Congress to maintain current language from the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015 (P.L. 113-235) pertaining to the allocation of LIHEAP funds to the states. We also urge the inclusion of language that will enable the full year LIHEAP appropriation to be released promptly. This will allow states to quickly and efficiently assist low-income households with the delivery of essential home heating oil or restoration of vital gas or electric utility service as soon as winter weather arrives.

A CR creates unique funding challenges for LIHEAP programs in the nation's cold-weather regions. In these states, almost all LIHEAP funding is obligated in the first quarter of the fiscal year to meet the critical heating needs of low-income households. States rely upon the certainty of stable, timely funding to provide meaningful assistance to low-income households struggling to afford the basic necessity of home energy when severe cold weather takes hold.

The LIHEAP program is vitally important to the CONEG governors. In the Northeast and across the nation, LIHEAP assistance is targeted to households with the lowest income and highest energy burden. The majority of LIHEAP recipients have incomes far below the eligibility criteria of 150 percent of the federal poverty level (\$23,595 for a two-person household in 2015). More

than ninety percent of LIHEAP households have at least one vulnerable member. These low-income households, particularly low-income senior households, spend a disproportionate amount of their income on home energy, often over three times more than non-low-income households.

Keeping warm and safe is particularly challenging for low-income households in the Northeast which has some of the country's oldest homes and coldest climates. More than any other region of the country, Northeast households are dependent upon expensive delivered fuels. For many low-income households, switching to less expensive heating fuels is simply not an option.

The CONEG governors deeply appreciate your longstanding support of LIHEAP, and we recognize the difficult fiscal decisions confronting Congress this year. However, the uncertainty regarding the funding level and the timing of the release of LIHEAP funds under a CR prevents states from finalizing benefit levels or processing timely payments to utilities, vendors or oil dealers. The assurance that maximum LIHEAP funding will be released early in the heating season is critical to helping our states quickly provide benefits to those households with the greatest and most immediate needs.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,

/o.s./  
Dannel P. Malloy  
Governor of Connecticut  
CONEG Chair

/o.s./  
Charles D. Baker  
Governor of Massachusetts  
CONEG Vice-Chair

/o.s./  
Peter Shumlin  
Governor of Vermont  
CONEG Lead Governor for  
LIHEAP

*Identical letters were also sent to the Senate Appropriations Committee and the Subcommittee on Labor, HHS.*