

September 30, 2014

The Honorable Sylvia Burwell
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Burwell,

As states prepare for the rapidly approaching winter heating season, funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is again provided under a continuing resolution (P.L. 113-164). To ensure the greatest certainty in efficiently and promptly delivering LIHEAP assistance to the low-income families most in need, the Coalition of Northeastern Governors (CONEG) urges you to release without delay the full amount of each state's LIHEAP funding allocation available under the continuing resolution.

As winter weather arrives in the northeast region, our states are preparing to open the LIHEAP programs. Decisions on benefit levels and contracts with vendors must be made now since our states spend the majority of the LIHEAP funds within the first three months of the federal fiscal year. Without the certainty provided by the timely release of the maximum allocation of LIHEAP funds under the continuing resolution, our states cannot finalize benefit levels or payments to utilities, vendors or oil dealers.

Temperatures in some areas of the Northeast have already dipped into the low 30s. For cold-weather states, the timely release of the maximum amount of LIHEAP funding is critically important to provide the greatest purchasing power of the LIHEAP benefit, and to ensure the efficient administration of the LIHEAP program. For the LIHEAP households, receiving the full benefit at the beginning of the heating season means an essential delivery of home heating oil or restoration of gas or electric utility service before winter weather becomes deadly. It also lessens the need to supplement an initial partial benefit with "crisis payments" for the more expensive emergency delivery of less than a tankful of heating fuel.

Households in the Northeast face some of the nation's highest home heating bills due to the extended winter heating season and heating fuel prices that typically exceed national averages, regardless of the fuel used. They are more likely to be dependent on expensive delivered fuels, such as home heating oil or propane, and are therefore not protected by utility service shut-off moratoria. If LIHEAP funds are not available to these households, the fuel cannot be delivered.

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We recognize that a continuing resolution creates uncertainty for the agency's administration of the LIHEAP programs. However, the uncertainty created by a delay in the release of the maximum amount of LIHEAP funds places hardships on those vulnerable citizens for whom the program is a critical lifeline. Therefore, we urge you to release promptly the full amount of each state's LIHEAP allocation available under the current continuing resolution. The need is immediate and great.

Sincerely,

/o.s./
Margaret Wood Hassan
Governor of New Hampshire
CONEG Chair

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

/o.s./
Peter Shumlin
Governor of Vermont
Lead Governor - LIHEAP