

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 18, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

As you work to craft a coronavirus recovery package, we write to urge you to provide timely and targeted relief to Americans who are in greatest need during the ongoing economic downturn. Specifically, we ask that you provide at least \$1 billion in additional funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

In light of estimates from the Administration that unemployment could reach 20%, twice as high as during the Great Recession, current funding for LIHEAP is insufficient to meet the challenge of this growing crisis. Even in a modest recession, the U.S. could see unemployment severely impact millions of Americans, and we know economic downturns increase the need for this vital program. In 2009, two million additional families received assistance and applications spiked 20 percent, despite a drop in energy prices the following fall. As we approach the end of this month, our states expect claims will increase as people struggle to pay their utility bills. According to the National Energy Assistance Directors' Association (NEADA), full funding for LIHEAP could help an additional 4.4 million low-income families.

LIHEAP is the main federal program that helps low-income households – with a targeted focus on high risk groups including seniors, those with disabilities, and families with young children – pay their energy bills during both the cold winter and hot summer months. While gasoline prices are decreasing across the country, energy prices today are still unaffordable for many Americans. LIHEAP assistance is an indispensable lifeline, helping to ensure that recipients do not have to choose between paying their energy bills and affording other necessities like food and medicine. As the economic impact of coronavirus spreads, it will disproportionately hit low-wage workers who often live paycheck to paycheck. For these workers, working from home is not an option and a missed paycheck could have a significant impact on their finances.

Furthermore, LIHEAP provides a crucial safety net to protect our nation's seniors. In fiscal year 2019, LIHEAP provided heating assistance to more than two million senior households, representing 40 percent of the total households served. Additional funding for LIHEAP will support seniors during this time. It would provide some measure of stability by assisting with utility costs and helping keep the lights and heat on for some of the most vulnerable members of our society. Taking additional action to fund LIHEAP will send a strong message of support for the health and well-being of those fragile households struggling to maintain energy security.


According NEADA, current funding is only able to serve about 5.8 million households or just one out of six eligible households. In addition, the average LIHEAP grant now covers a lower portion of average home energy costs, leaving many low-income families and seniors struggling to pay for the basic necessity of home energy and having fewer resources available to meet other essential needs. In addition, NEADA has reported that the states can move quickly to disburse funds to potential new and existing clients, making it one of the most effective ways to support those in need.

Thank you for your attention to and consideration of our request. We look forward to continuing to work with you to support this important program and to help provide access to affordable home energy for the most vulnerable households in our states in this time of crisis. Further, we recognize there will also be a need for additional weatherization assistance following this pandemic.

Sincerely,



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator

CC: Chairman Blunt
Ranking Member Murray