

May 18, 2017

The Honorable Thomas Price
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Re: Release of the remaining FY 2017 Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) Funds from the FY 2017 Consolidated Appropriations Act

Dear Secretary Price,

The National Consumer Law Center, on behalf of its low-income clients, respectfully requests your consideration to promptly release to the states the final 10 percent (\$300 million) of the FY 2017 LIHEAP appropriations. We support the attached May 16, 2017 request from the National Energy Assistance Directors' Association (NEADA), particularly in light of the urgent unmet need in the states to help low-income households afford essential energy service.

LIHEAP helps vulnerable, low-income households pay their energy bills, but the program need is great and only about one in five eligible households receives LIHEAP support. The remaining \$300 million will help families in every state avoid disconnections and afford life-saving air conditioning during sweltering heat waves. LIHEAP-eligible households face dire choices such as skipping meals and medical care in order to pay the energy bills. As raised in the NEADA letter, this winter's home energy prices increased 6.7 percent from last year. Over 30 states have seasonal temperature protections from shut-off during the winter, but those protections are lifted by the spring, causing an increase in the number of low-income families with disconnection notices.

As we near the start of summer, LIHEAP assistance is critical for life-saving air-conditioning. Older adults, young children and persons with chronic medical conditions are particularly susceptible to heat-related illness and are at risk of heat-related death. We appreciate your consideration of NEADA's request to promptly release the remaining LIHEAP funds to the states.

Sincerely,



Richard DuBois
Executive Director
National Consumer Law Center, on behalf of its low-income clients

Enc.

NEADA

National Energy Assistance Directors' Association

May 16, 2017

The Honorable Tom Price
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Price:

On behalf of the National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA), representing the state directors of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), I am writing to urge you to release as soon as possible remaining funds available from the FY 2017 Consolidated Appropriations Act.

We request that the final ten percent (\$300 million) of the full appropriation of \$3.3 billion be released no later than June 1, 2017, giving states only 122 days to deploy these critical funds before the end of the federal fiscal year on September 30, 2017. NEADA is concerned that any further delay in the release of appropriated funds will make it difficult for states to cover the needs of poor families facing shut-off of vital utility services as a result of the expiration of winter shut-off moratoriums, or to meet staffing and planning requirements to start up summer cooling programs in warm weather states.

The release would provide well overdue support for programs that have already been approved by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). These funds would be used immediately to help some of the nation's most vulnerable households maintain access to electric and gas service, to cover outstanding bills relating to unexpected delivered fuels emergencies and to allow states to begin planning their summer cooling programs.

The average cost of home heating has remained unaffordable for millions of low-income households this winter across the country with an average annual price of \$782, representing an increase of 6.7 percent or almost \$50 over the comparable cost of home heating last year. According to the US Energy Information Administration, the average home heating cost this winter for those using propane was \$1,368, heating oil \$1,282, electricity \$920 and natural gas \$560. LIHEAP assistance is only sufficient to reach about one of five eligible households and 70 percent of recipient households have at least one vulnerable and at-risk member who is elderly, disabled or have a child under the age of six.

LIHEAP's impact in many cases goes beyond providing bill payment assistance by playing a crucial role in maintaining family stability. It enables elderly citizens to live independently and ensures that young children have safe, warm homes to live in. Although the circumstances that lead each client to seek LIHEAP assistance vary, LIHEAP enables people to cope with difficult circumstances with dignity.

I appreciate your consideration of NEADA's request to release program funds. Our states are ready to deploy these funds to help some of the nation's poorest families pay their home energy bills.

Sincerely,



John Harvanko
Chair