November 22, 2010

The Honorable Daniel Inouye
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Inouye, Ranking Member Cochran, and Chairman Harkin:

We write to thank you for your consistent support of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and to request that you maintain level funding for the program.

As you know, on October 28th, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released block grant assistance to states under the Continuing Resolution (CR), which funds the federal government at Fiscal Year 2010 levels through December 3rd. Although the CR funded LIHEAP at last year’s level of $5.1 billion, due to the differences in discretionary spending levels reported in the House and Senate, HHS provided grants to states based upon the lower reported value. The results have been devastating for our states during a period when we are entering the coldest months of the year and facing increased heating bills, in particular for homes heated with heating oil, which face a 12 percent increase in costs, as forecasted by the Energy Information Administration. Consequently, unless Congress maintains fiscal year 2010 funding levels for this critical program, the average LIHEAP block grant to states will be cut by 40 percent.

This is a challenging time for low-income Americans. With the unemployment rate at 9.6% nationwide and 42.4 million people receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) support in August, another record and a 50% increase over 2008, maintaining full funding for LIHEAP is essential. The U.S. Census recently reported that 43.6 million people were counted as poor in the United States, or one in seven Americans, the largest number in the measure’s 50-year recorded history.

Given the unique structure of the program, unless we finalize funding for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2011 now, the millions of Americans who need help paying their energy bills this
winter could see no additional assistance. As such, under any appropriations bill that Congress
considers prior to the expiration of the CR, we would request that you extend LIHEAP’s funding
through September 30th, 2011, at last year’s funding levels. This would provide stability to the
program and allow HHS to allocate LIHEAP funds in a timely manner to provide vital heating
assistance this winter.

Again, we want to thank you for your commitment to helping low-income families cope
during this tough economic climate, and look forward to working together in a fiscally
responsible manner to address this serious issue.

Sincerely,

Jack Reed
Sherrod Brown
Patrick J. Leahy
Barbara A. Mikulski
Herb Kohl

Olympia J. Snowe
Susan M. Collins
Christopher S. Bond
Richard G. Lugar
Scott P. Brown