

**Testimony of the National Consumer Law Center, on Behalf of Its Low-Income Clients
Before the Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development**

FY 2026 Appropriations for the Department of Energy’s Weatherization Program

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We respectfully write to you to request your continued support for the Department of Energy’s (DOE) Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) core program (\$375 million), WAP training and technical assistance (\$15 million), and the Weatherization Readiness Fund (\$52 million). Furthermore, we urge you to support retention of the staff needed to administer the WAP program. Since 1976, vital weatherization services have reached millions of households and grown a skilled workforce in our communities which in turn has strengthened local economies by supporting small contractor businesses and the building materials industries and merchants. WAP has played a crucial role in addressing the energy affordability crisis for vulnerable households, providing energy efficiency improvements to reduce household energy costs and improve the health and safety of the home. For nearly 50 years, WAP has helped seniors, veterans, low-income families, and individuals with disabilities, save money on their energy bills. With rising utility costs and shutoffs due to nonpayment, WAP is more important than ever to protect vulnerable, cash-strapped families.

Since its creation under Title IV of the Energy Conservation and Production Act in 1976, the program has reduced the energy burden for over 7 million families.² Rising heating bills, due to the 1973 oil crisis, presented a significant burden for households, particularly those in cold regions. The crisis prompted Congress to authorize WAP to address the rising cost of utilities that had thrown many households into debt.³ The program initially focused on small measures, such as caulking and weatherstripping, but shifted in the 1980s to more permanent and cost-effective measures (such as insulation and improving the efficiency of heating systems) that provided greater bill savings. By the 1990s, the program integrated energy audits and cooling efficiency measures, such as air conditioner replacement, which had a substantial impact on homes in warmer regions.⁴ WAP continued to evolve to eventually cover U.S. territories beyond the states and with more funding appropriated to increase the program’s ability to weatherize more homes. By 2009, Congress appropriated an additional \$5 billion for WAP and the program

¹ The nonprofit [National Consumer Law Center® \(NCLC®\)](https://www.nclc.org/) works for economic justice for low-income and other disadvantaged people in the U.S. through policy analysis and advocacy, publications, litigation, and training.

² U.S. Department of Energy, Weatherization Assistance Program, available at <https://www.energy.gov/scep/wap/weatherization-assistance-program>.

³ U.S. Department of Energy, State and Community Energy Programs, “Weatherization Assistance Program Briefing Book” (October 2024).

⁴ U.S. Department of Energy, State and Community Energy Programs, “Weatherization Assistance Program Briefing Book” (October 2024).

weatherized over one million homes in three years.⁵ In 2020, Congress authorized WAP through FY2025 and enabled the program to “reweatherize” a home if 15 years had passed since the home had been serviced by WAP. In 2022, Congress again increased funding and further expanded the program to address whole-house energy efficiency needs.

WAP provides services in 35,000 homes on average annually, making homes more comfortable and lowering annual energy costs by \$372 or more on average.⁶ The program serves as an essential resource for low-income families, who spend a disproportionate amount of their income on energy bills. Low income households spend about 14% of their annual income on energy bills, compared to 3% for higher income households.⁷ WAP saves low-income families annually on utility bills, helping these families achieve long-term home and financial stability.⁸

With the increasing frequency of extreme heat and cold events, cash-strapped families in inefficient homes experience greater difficulty keeping the lights on. Seniors or older adults are especially vulnerable to extreme weather events, and deaths from extreme weather mount each year. When extreme temperatures strike, struggling families experience burdensome high utility bills, leading to utility service disconnection for nonpayment. Loss of utility service during extreme temperature results in a dangerous home environment, especially for seniors, children, and individuals with chronic health conditions. In an effort to avoid utility service disconnection, some families reduce their energy usage in ways that can put their lives at risk. For example, Maricopa County, Arizona experienced 645 heat-related deaths in 2023 alone, a 52 percent increase over 2022.⁹ More than ever, programs like WAP play a critical role in protecting the health and safety of vulnerable households.

Yet WAP’s importance goes beyond reducing energy bills and saving lives during extreme weather. By DOE’s own estimates, WAP measures make homes more livable and comfortable for occupants, which results in fewer missed days from work (due to sick days or doctor visits),

⁵ U.S. Department of Energy, State and Community Energy Programs, “Weatherization Assistance Program Briefing Book” (October 2024).

⁶ U.S. Department of Energy, Weatherization Assistance Program, available at <https://www.energy.gov/scep/wap/weatherization-assistance-program>.

⁷ Rose, E., B. Hawkins. “Background Data and Statistics on Low-Income Energy Use and Burden for the Weatherization Assistance Program: Update for Fiscal Year 2020,” *Oak Ridge National Laboratory* (June 2020), available at https://weatherization.ornl.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ORNL_TM-2020_1566.pdf.

⁸ Sophie Mariam, “LIHEAP and WAP: A Dynamic Duo for Reducing the Low-Income Energy Burden,” National Association for State Community Services Programs, available at <https://nascsp.org/liheap-and-wap-a-dynamic-duo-for-reducing-the-low-income-energy-burden/#:~:text=Weatherization%20services%20produce%20an%20average,such%20as%20health%20and%20safety..>

⁹ These deaths and others around the country demonstrate that it is more important than ever that the Department and its 56 Grantees work closely together to provide essential, life-saving services that mitigate extreme heat and cold. See 2023 Heat Related Deaths Report, Maricopa County Department of Public Health, <https://www.maricopa.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/5820#:~:text=Maricopa%20County%20identified%20a%20total,related%20deaths%20were%20heat%20caused.>

and families save an average of \$514 in out-of-pocket medical expenses.¹⁰ The program's benefit to families outweighs the cost of the program, with families receiving \$2.78 in non-energy benefits (i.e. improved health, safety, and comfort) for every \$1.00 invested in the program.¹¹ In short, WAP is a cost-effective program that provides significant savings and health and safety benefits to vulnerable families.

The program additionally supports over 8,500 jobs per year for home contractors and auditors, strengthening local economies.¹² The program provides grants to all 50 states, as well the District of Columbia, Native American tribes, and U.S. territories, which contract with local weatherization providers to offer WAP services; these providers often include home performance contractors and trades.¹³ By contracting with these providers, WAP supports local workforce development and promotes new job opportunities in communities. In effect, WAP helps revitalize communities and stimulate jobs and economic growth.

WAP success stories are many, demonstrating the immense value of the program for low-income families and communities.

- Joshua Payne of Detroit experienced winter gas bills ranging from \$500 to \$600 monthly in his century-old home. He turned to a local nonprofit, where he found out about Michigan's WAP and signed up. After a two-year wait, he received significant weatherization upgrades to his home, including adding attic insulation and replacing a poorly fitted door. Payne expressed relief to have his energy burden reduced. "These [programs] are important because people like myself, they're not financially able to afford certain things that are expensive to get done. They [the agency] recognize that. They're here to help people who work hard, like myself, and others, that want more, and want better, but just need a little helping hand sometimes," said Payne.¹⁴
- The Jorgenson family in Greenfield, Wisconsin experienced uncomfortable home temperatures and high heating bills. Through WAP, the family was able to get a new energy efficient furnace and insulate their home and save money on their utility bills. In

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Energy, State and Community Energy Programs, "Weatherization Assistance Program Briefing Book" (October 2024).

¹¹ U.S. Department of Energy, State and Community Energy Programs, "Weatherization Assistance Program Briefing Book" (October 2024). See also Tonn, B., D. Carroll, S. Pigg, M. Blasnik, G. Dalhoff, J. Berger, E. Rose, B. Hawkins, J. Eisenberg, F. Uncar, I. Bensch, and C. Cowan. "Weatherization Works – Summary of Findings from the Retrospective Evaluation of the U.S. Department of Energy's Weatherization Assistance Program," Oak Ridge National Laboratory (2014), [ORNL/TM-2014/338](https://www.ornl.gov/research-reports/ornl-tm-2014/338).

¹² United States Department of Energy, Weatherization Assistance Program, available at <https://www.energy.gov/scep/wap/weatherization-assistance-program>.

¹³ U.S. Department of Energy, State and Community Energy Program, "Weatherization Assistance Program," available at <https://nascsp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/weatherization-assistance-program-fact-sheet.pdf>.

¹⁴ Sarah Williams. "Has Detroit's weatherization assistance program worked, and what happens to it now?" *Metromode* (July 2022), available at <https://www.secondwavemedia.com/metromode/features/WAP.aspx>.

just three months, they saw their bill drop from \$347 per month to \$134 per month as a result of weatherization—a 60% reduction.¹⁵

- A disabled household in south Texas experienced high bills in their home, and applied for weatherization assistance. WAP provided essential improvements, including sealing their windows and replacing outdated systems, that resulted in increased home comfort and lower bills. “We feel a big difference in our house. It’s very nice. We sleep better. In the daytime, it’s a lot cooler. We were paying \$300 and something. It’s really gone down halfway,” said the homeowner.¹⁶
- “The best part of working in weatherization, for me, is getting to see first-hand the positive impact we have on so many families. The work that we get to do on a house might just mean a family gets to stay in their home.” - Jeremy Beelman, Energy Auditor, Community Action of Southeast Iowa.¹⁷

These stories and more attest to the value and importance of WAP in improving lives of seniors, disabled individuals, children, and low-income families across the country while creating local jobs and supporting the local economy.¹⁸ **Thus, we respectfully request your continued support for the Department of Energy’s (DOE) Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) core program (\$375 million), WAP training and technical assistance (\$15 million), the Weatherization Readiness Fund (\$52 million), and urge you to support retention of the staff needed to administer the WAP program.**

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Energy, “Weatherization Improves Energy Efficiency and Comfort in Wisconsin,” Nov. 2023, available at <https://www.energy.gov/scep/wap/articles/weatherization-improves-efficiency-and-comfort-wisconsin>.

¹⁶ “WAP Saves Family Money on Energy Bills,” Community Council of South Central Texas (Oct. 2020), available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrghQ1zdzEw>.

¹⁷ “National Community Action Partnerships: Faces of Weatherization 2023,” Community Action Partnership (Dec. 2023), available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3h7NfeLm558>.

¹⁸ National Association for State Community Service Programs, NASCSP Weatherization Videos (see e.g., KCEOC Community Action Partnership video showing the WAP workers installing WAP measures), available at <https://nascsp.org/wap/advocacy/weatherization-success-stories/>.