

**Testimony of the National Consumer Law Center, on Behalf of Its Low-Income Clients
Before the House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health & Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies**

FY 2027 Appropriations for the HHS Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program

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Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro and members of the Subcommittee, we thank you for your strong and continued support for the U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).² LIHEAP is the cornerstone of federal and state efforts to ensure energy security by preventing energy disconnection and protecting the most vulnerable households, including seniors, veterans and families with young children from hypothermia in the winter and heat stress (even death) in the summer. LIHEAP has helped approximately 6 million households afford their energy bills.³ With over half of households with incomes below \$29,000 experiencing energy insecurity, LIHEAP is needed now more than ever as the need energy assistance grows. ***We respectfully request that LIHEAP be fully funded at \$5.1 billion⁴ to help more low-income households avoid the painful choice between the energy bill or medicine or food.***

Energy Unaffordability: Rising energy bills are straining the budgets of everyday people. New data from DOE’s Energy Information Agency Residential Energy Consumption Survey (RECs) show that one-in-three households (33%) are experiencing “energy insecurity”.⁵ Energy insecurity means the household has sacrificed another basic necessity to pay the energy bill; kept the home at unsafe temperatures; received a disconnection notice, or has been unable to heat or cool their home. Energy insecurity is disproportionately concentrated among households of color, particularly Black (55%) and Native American households (56.6%) versus the US total rate (32.9%). Every region of the country is struggling with energy insecurity.⁶ As shown in the table below the lower the income, the higher the rate of energy insecurity with over half of households with incomes below \$29,000 and almost two-out-of-three (63.7%) of households with incomes less than \$10,000 year experiencing energy insecurity.

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 42 U.S.C. §8621 *et seq.*

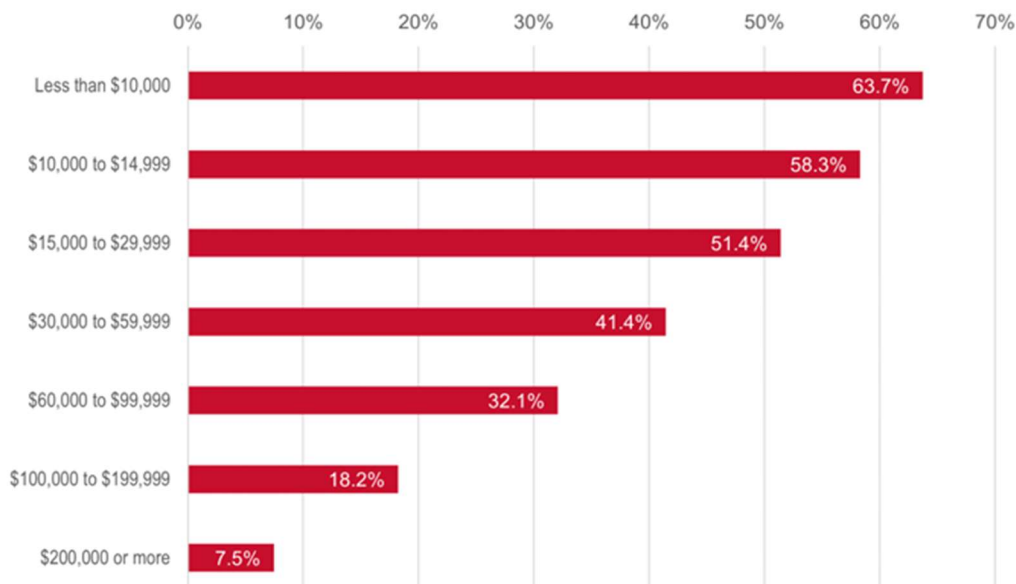
³ National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition (NEUAC) LIHEAP Fast Facts Infographic, available at <https://neuac.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/LIHEAP-FY2024-Infographic.pdf>.

⁴ 42 U.S.C. §8621(b).

⁵ John Howat, National Consumer Law Center, “Energy Insecurity on the Rise: Preliminary Findings from the 2024 Residential Energy Consumption Survey,” (March 2026). https://www.nclc.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/202603_Issue-Brief_Energy-Insecurity-on-the-Rise_-_Preliminary-Findings-from-the-2024-Residential-Energy-Consumption-Survey.pdf.

⁶ *Id.*

Percentage of U.S. Households Reporting Any Household Energy Insecurity by Annual Household Income



Source: John Howat, National Consumer Law Center, “Energy Insecurity on the Rise: Preliminary Findings from the 2024 Residential Energy Consumption Survey,” (March 2026).

LIHEAP’s Important Impact: The LIHEAP program, established during the Reagan administration, is a fiscally responsible investment that prevents costly energy-related emergencies. At the current funding level, LIHEAP keeps the heat on in winter, and cooling in the summer. LIHEAP saves lives, and it has helped keep home energy more affordable for over 40 years. For instance, in 2024 LIHEAP has:

- Prevented over 2 million energy disconnections or has reconnected struggling households
- Lifted 57,000 children and 78,000 seniors out of poverty
- Made long-term improvements to energy affordability for more than 50,000 homes with weatherization⁷

Yet the need for LIHEAP in all the states and territories remains great. Households are reeling from the increase in home heating from this winter (the average cost of home heating is expected to increase by 11%)⁸. Low-income households spend almost 4 times more of their income on energy costs than non-low-income households.⁹ Home energy is also more expensive during prolonged periods of extreme temperatures because households use more fuel to keep the home at safe temperatures. Prolonged colder than normal temperatures, such as the sharp cold wave that resulted in 22 deaths and affected a wide swath of the country January to March

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ See “Mid-Winter Heating Price Update, Home Heating Costs Continue to Rise – Estimated to Jump by 11 percent putting millions of families at risk of falling behind on their bills; electric and natural gas prices drive sharp increase in winter heating bills,” National Energy Assistance Directors Association (Feb. 12, 2026) available at https://neada.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/NEADA-Winter-Heating-Update-2_12_26.pdf.

⁹ National Energy Assistance Directors Association, “Energy Hardship Report” (February 2026) at p.4. <https://neada.org/energy-affordability-project>.

2019¹⁰, can result in an unexpected, increased use of heating fuels. Likewise, prolonged hot temperatures, which are becoming more common, can result in an increased need for air conditioning, particularly for consumers with certain medical conditions.¹¹

Struggling low-income households are at risk of disconnection from essential utilities because they do not have the savings or income on hand to afford their energy bills. The Federal Reserve finds that almost 4 in 10 households report that they would have difficulty with an unexpected expense of \$400.¹² Household income volatility (the dramatic fluctuation of income over time) has significant effects on a household's well-being.¹³ When income is hard to predict, paying monthly for necessities such as utility service can be difficult, if not impossible, without help from programs like LIHEAP.

LIHEAP Protects Health and Safety: Recent national studies have documented the dire choices low-income households face when energy bills are unaffordable. Because adequate heating and cooling are tied to the habitability of the home, low-income families will go to great lengths to pay their energy bills. Studies show that low-income households, when faced with unaffordable energy bills, cut back on necessities such as food, medicine and medical care.¹⁴ The U.S. Department of Agriculture has documented the connection between low-income households, especially those with elderly persons, experiencing very low food security and heating and cooling seasons when energy bills are high.¹⁵ A pediatric study in Boston documented an increase in the number of extremely low weight children, age 6 to 24 months, in the three months following the coldest months, when compared to the rest of the year.¹⁶ A 2007 Colorado study found that the second leading cause of homelessness for families with children was the inability to pay for home energy.¹⁷

¹⁰ See e.g., "Extreme cold in the Midwest led to high power demand and record natural gas demand," US Energy Information Administration, Today in Energy (Feb. 26, 2019) available at <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=38472>.

¹¹ Lynne Page Snyder and Christopher Baker, *Affordable Home Energy and Health: Making the Connections*, AARP Public Policy Institute (June 2010) at pp.10-11, available at https://neada.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/aarp_neada_report_affordable_home_energy_and_health_june_2010.pdf.

¹² Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve, *Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2024* (May 2025) at p.41, available at <https://www.federalreserve.gov/publications/files/2024-report-economic-well-being-us-households-202505.pdf>.

¹³ See e.g., Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve, *Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2024* (May 2025) at p.23 (27% of workers reported having irregular work schedules in 2024), available at <https://www.federalreserve.gov/publications/files/2024-report-economic-well-being-us-households-202505.pdf>.

¹⁴ See e.g., National Energy Assistance Directors' Association, *2018 National Energy Assistance Survey*, Tables in section IV, F and G (Dec. 2018) (to pay their energy bills, 32% of LIHEAP recipients went without food, 41% went without medical or dental care, 31% did not fill or took less than the full dose of a prescribed medicine, 13% got a payday loan). Available at <http://neada.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/liheapsurvey2018.pdf>.

¹⁵ Mark Nord and Linda S. Kantor, *Seasonal Variation in Food Insecurity Is Associated with Heating and Cooling Costs Among Low-Income Elderly Americans*, *The Journal of Nutrition*, 136 (Nov. 2006) 2939-2944.

¹⁶ Deborah A. Frank, MD et al., *Heat or Eat: The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program and Nutritional and Health Risks Among Children Less Than 3 years of Age*, *AAP Pediatrics* v.118, no.5 (Nov. 2006) e1293-e1302.

¹⁷ Colorado Interagency Council on Homelessness, *Colorado Statewide Homeless Count Summer, 2006*, research conducted by University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center (Feb. 2007) at p.9.

When people are unable to afford paying their home energy bills, dangerous and even fatal results occur. In the winter, families resort to using unsafe heating sources such as space heaters, ovens and burners, all of which are fire hazards. Heating equipment is the second leading cause of home fires and space heaters accounted for 16 percent of fire deaths from 2019 to 2023.¹⁸ In the summer, the inability to keep the home cool can be lethal, especially to seniors. According to the CDC, older adults, young children and persons with chronic medical conditions are particularly susceptible to heat-related illness and are at a high risk of heat-related death. The CDC reported a higher incidents of heat-related illness emergency room visits in 2023 (a year with record breaking hot temperatures) compared to 2018-2022.¹⁹ The CDC also notes that air-conditioning is critical to protect against heat-related illness.²⁰ **LIHEAP assistance helps these vulnerable seniors, young children and medically vulnerable persons keep their homes at safe temperatures during the winter and summer and also funds low-income weatherization work to make homes more energy efficient.**

Conclusion: LIHEAP saves lives, and it has helped keep home energy more affordable for over 40 years. The program serves a critical part of the energy security mission and it also requires full-strength staffing.²¹ LIHEAP is a proven, results-driven program that works to bring fuel costs within a manageable range for vulnerable low-income seniors, the disabled and families with young children. *We respectfully request that FY 2027 LIHEAP be fully funded at \$5.1 billion²² to help more low-income households avoid the painful choice between the energy bill or medicine or food.*

¹⁸ Shelby Hall, “Home Structure Fires” (August 2025) Figure 9, available at <https://www.nfpa.org/education-and-research/research/nfpa-research/fire-statistical-reports/home-structure-fires>.

¹⁹ CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), Vol.73, No.15 (April 18, 2024), “Heat-Related Emergency Department Visits – United States, May-September 2023” available at <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/154201>. See also, Karen Lussan, “Protecting Access to Essential Utility Service During Extreme Heat and Climate Change”. <https://www.nclc.org/resources/protecting-access-to-essential-utility-service/>.

²⁰ CDC, “About Heat and Your Health” available at https://www.cdc.gov/heat-health/about/index.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fextreme-heat%2Fabout%2Findex.html.

²¹ See e.g., joint letter from 230 state legislators from 38 states urging congressional leadership to restore the federal staff responsible for administering LIHEAP, available at <https://www.ncelenviro.org/articles/state-legislators-call-for-reinstatement-of-federal-liheap-staff-to-safeguard-critical-energy-assistance-program/>.