

Operation Fuel

One Regency Drive
Suite 200
Bloomfield, CT 06002
(860) 243-2345
(860) 726-9310
www.operationfuel.org

Appropriations Committee

February 10, 2009

Good afternoon members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Pat Wrice, and I am executive director of Operation Fuel. On behalf of Operation Fuel, I would like to thank you for your recent support.

The \$18 million budget allocation for winter heating assistance has made a difference in the lives of many of Connecticut's families and senior citizens. It's allowed Operation Fuel to help more households than we'd ever imagined. This never could have happened without the support of our state legislators.

Operation was allocated:

- \$8.5 million for households living between 151% and 200% of the federal poverty guidelines,
- \$5 million for households living between 201% of the federal poverty guidelines and 100% of the state median household income. and
- \$3.5 million for households who have at least one member who is age 65 or older living between zero income and 100% of the state median household income

We know this is a tough time for everyone and that makes the state's commitment to Operation Fuel even more significant. When these programs

were announced, our fuel banks received thousands of calls from seniors and families who anticipated needing heating assistance. Since Operation Fuel started accepting applications in December, we have provided energy assistance to over 3,000 households and granted \$ 1.5 million in grants. These are households that are not eligible for the CEAP or CHAP programs funded by the Federal Government.

As the economy worsens, more middle income families will be seeking help for their energy bills. While the cost of fuel oil has stabilized, that is not the case for electricity and natural gas. These costs have continued to skyrocket.

We all know that energy costs in Connecticut continue to be among the highest in the nation, and they continue to increase at a rate that far outpaces families' abilities to keep up. The gap between what households can afford to pay and their actual energy costs continues to widen as the cost of energy increases. As a result, more families are at risk of having to make choices between adequate nutrition, medical care, housing, and other basic necessities in order to pay home energy bills.

Operation Fuel is continuing to work on expanding our efforts to respond to the need. As a state, we can no longer depend solely upon the federal government's Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program to serve our state's most vulnerable citizens.

Again, thank you for including Operation Fuel in last year's budget surplus and for your commitment to assuring that Connecticut's most vulnerable residents have access to desperately needed energy assistance. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.