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**Written Testimony in Support of Year-round Energy Assistance
Public Hearing ~ September 15, 2009
Appropriations, Human Services and Energy Committees
Allocation Plan for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program Block Grant**

Senator Harp, Rep. Geragosian, Senator Doyle, Rep. Walker, Senator Fonfara, Rep. Nardello and members of the Appropriations, Human Services and Energy Committees,

My name is Jennifer Castonguay, I am a single parent of two children and we live in Bristol, CT. I want to thank the state of CT for helping me with fuel assistance during the past few winters. I have multiple sclerosis (MS) and live on a fixed income from Social Security Disability Insurance. The winter fuel assistance that my family receives is very helpful.

However, I would like to share with you some of my experiences living with MS and how receiving fuel assistance that could be used toward cooling costs would make a significant difference in my life and the lives of others who need air conditioning as a medical necessity. As the plan stands now, the moneys must be used for your source of heat only, and in my case, that was Natural Gas.

This past winter my heating costs were approximately \$400 with the fuel assistance stipend that we received. However during the summer my cooling costs are \$1700. That seems to be where I have the greatest need, yet I am unable to attach the dollars to that C P & L account because it is not deemed a medical need. But as an MS patient, I require air conditioning as a medical need. Over the past few months, I was no longer able to afford our home in Southington. We now rent an apartment in Bristol that is more affordable.

Heat or high humidity can make many people with MS experience a worsening of their symptoms. Doctors believe that this occurs because heat causes nerves (whose myelin covering has been destroyed from MS) to conduct electrical signals less efficiently, possibly due to higher rates of inflammation when the body is too warm. For me, when my body is too warm, I get increased MS symptoms including:

- Weakness, numbness and stiffness in my legs and arms
- Extreme Fatigue
- Blurred vision or double vision
- Trouble concentrating
- Severe nerve pain (sharp stabbing pains randomly spread all over my body)

Really, any MS symptoms can be much worse in the heat. Sometimes, symptoms appear that we might not have felt before, which is the result of a lesion in a corresponding area of the brain or spinal cord that was slight enough that it did not cause a relapse or symptoms dramatic enough to notice.

As the Legislature, the Office of Policy and Management and the Department of Social Services move forward in adopting the allocation plan for LIHEAP, I urge you to remember that for the over 6,000 people with multiple sclerosis in Connecticut and those with other medical conditions we need access to fuel assistance for cooling costs throughout the year, not only for heat in the winter months.

Please work with Operation Fuel and other resources to increase access to fuel assistance funds and allow individuals who live with medical conditions that require air conditioning to obtain funding for cooling costs.

Thank you.