

Good afternoon Senators Harp, Fonfara and Doyle, Representatives Geragosian, Nardello, and Walker and other members of the Appropriations, Energy and Technology, and Human Services Committees. My name is Raymond Wilson and I am the Chair of the Low Income Energy Advisory Board.

As everyone knows, energy costs continue to be a significant expense for Connecticut households. More families and senior citizens than ever are struggling to keep their homes heated and their electricity on. Unfortunately, there are countless vulnerable households that can not make ends meet without help from energy assistance programs such as LIHEAP.

Right now the projected LIHEAP budget for our state is \$46 million LESS than it was this past year. And while we are expecting a substantial decrease in federal energy assistance funding, we know there will be an even greater need for help. This means that we are facing an extremely critical situation. Unless something is done by our state legislature, thousands of vulnerable households will suffer as a result of these drastic cuts.

That is why we are here today. We need our legislators to intervene and to commit state money to assure that families with young children and the elderly are not left without heat this winter. We are requesting that our legislature provide \$46 million in energy assistance benefits to supplement the money that is expected to be lost to Connecticut by the reduction in LIHEAP funds. This would bring our state to the same level of funding as last winter.

Without this supplemental funding, our vulnerable households – which are those with an elderly or disabled person or a child under age six – will have a difficult time keeping their homes warm this winter.

We also are extremely concerned that there has been a 40 percent decrease in funding for community action agencies to process requests for energy assistance. Based on last year, we are expecting there will be an increase in applications.

Operation Fuel and other private and non-profit organizations will do their best to help people who have no where else to turn. But losing \$46 million in energy assistance is astronomical. There is no way that charitable dollars can even begin to help replace public funding.

So in closing, the LIEAB committee members are asking our state legislators to bring Connecticut back to the same levels of energy assistance funding that we had last year. To accomplish this, we are asking the state to appropriate \$46 million to make up for the reduction in Connecticut's share of LIHEAP funds; to appropriate additional funds for the administrative costs of implementing the program; and to authorize the necessary funding to bring the CHAP program back up to last year's eligibility levels.