



**Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)  
Block Grant Allocation Plan FFY 2012**

**Public Hearing before Connecticut General Assembly  
Appropriations, Human Services, and Energy & Technology Committees**

**Testimony delivered September 27, 2011**

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Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members of the Appropriations, Human Services, and Energy & Technology Committees:

My name is Trish Donovan, and I am the Chief of Operations at the Community Renewal Team. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on the drastic effect that the State's proposed Energy Assistance Allocation Plan will have on tens of thousands of deserving Connecticut families.

One of my roles at CRT is to oversee the Energy Assistance Program, which is the largest one in the state. As you have already heard in previous testimony, last year CRT processed benefit applications for close to 34,000 households in our 40 town region. Our Director of Energy, Pat Monroe Walker, supervises an efficient and hardworking staff, who cover a territory from Enfield all the way to Old Saybrook. As you can imagine, this staff is hearing from program participants who heat with utilities – either natural gas or electric – and who are terribly frightened of what this winter will bring.

I want to take a minute to introduce you to just a few of those hard working customers, who weren't able to join us here at the LOB today. These are diligent participants. They have taken all of the right steps over the years to remain in good standing with the Utility

Companies. Normally they would be eligible for benefits. However, because of the state's proposed Energy Assistance Allocation Plan, they are likely to be left out this season.

The CRT staff spoke with them about what this will mean for their health, their safety, even their ability to remain in their housing! As you will hear, they have compelling stories to tell.

**Cheryl Bowman of Cromwell** is a 54-year-old paraplegic who broke her back in a car accident 31 years ago. She has many other health issues, including breast cancer and brittle bones, leading to a broken neck and a broken hip in the last several years. As she puts it, "A lot of people in my situation just give up and go into a nursing home, but I'm still managing more or less on my own." Her 72-year-old mother lives in Meriden, and comes in frequently to help out. For 28 years, Cheryl has rented an apartment with electric baseboard heat. It's a small place and there aren't many ways that she can rearrange the furniture, to increase the heat circulation. But she keeps the thermostat fairly low during the day, and lowers it further at night. However, as she explains, her health issues make her very susceptible to pneumonia.

Last year, Cheryl received an Energy Assistance benefit of \$880, which was matched by Northeast Utilities. She also enrolled in the matching payment plan, as she has in each of the last 15 or 16 years. When she had made her payments on time, every month, the electric company matched those, as well.

Cheryl could not join us today, because she has such limited mobility. However, she asked me to ask all of you to reconsider the allocation plan that is currently on the table. She said, "It just seems like they keep taking away more benefits and more money from the people who need them the most. I don't see how much more we can be squeezed."

**Diane Cedar of Middletown** would have liked to join us at today's hearing. She's been a successful medical receptionist for many years, but she lost her job just two weeks ago. It

was devastating. She left a job that she really liked for a new job with more benefits – something she thought would be good for her family. But several months later they laid her off. So instead of being with us this afternoon, Diane felt that she should concentrate on looking for work to support herself and her two children.

Diane heats her home with natural gas. She has brought in the WRAP program, and the weatherization technicians were impressed with the steps she had already taken to conserve energy. She has added plastic to her windows, changed to efficient light bulbs, put rugs in front of the doors as draft dodgers and closed off certain rooms in the winter.

Diane received a lump sum Energy Assistance benefit of \$640 last year, which was matched by Yankee Gas. She was also successful with the matching plan, always dialing her bill back to zero when she was through making her on-time payments. While she was employed in a medical office, Diane says that it has been extremely tough to make ends meet for her family of three. Clearly, this year will be worse, if she doesn't find another position.

In the 40-town region that CRT serves for energy assistance, there are **18,114 homes** like the ones I have described here. There are more than 18,000 people like Diane and Cheryl, adults who are proud heads of household will go without assistance if this plan is passed.

Throughout Central Connecticut, 61% of homes are heated with utilities. Here in Hartford it is even higher. Approximately 77% of customers use either natural gas or electricity to heat their homes.

As you know, these families will build up tremendous debts throughout the winter, during the so-called "No Freeze Moratorium." But they may be cut off on May 1. Without electricity and natural gas, many of these families will also lose the use of their hot water heaters and their stoves.

I ask that you reject the proposed Low Income Energy Plan, and call upon Washington to provide a more reasonable funding level.

- ✓ We must maintain FFY 2011 benefit levels (including utility and renter households).
- ✓ We must restore FFY 2011 funding levels for staffing.
- ✓ We must maintain “fuel blind” basic benefits

We strongly encourage you to rework this Allocation Plan. Thank you for your time and consideration.

**Community Renewal Team, Inc.**

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