

FTR



# Nonprofit Human Services Cabinet

## Appropriations, Human Services and Energy & Technology Committees Public Hearing September 27, 2011 Re: LIHEAP Block Grant

- Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of Hartford
- Children's League of Connecticut
- Connecticut AIDS Resource Coalition
- Connecticut Association for Community Action
- Connecticut Association for Human Services
- Connecticut Association of Area Agencies on Aging
- Connecticut Association of Nonprofits
- Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness
- Connecticut Community Providers Association
- Connecticut Consortium of Legal Services
- Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies
- Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services
- Connecticut Women's Consortium
- End Hunger Connecticut!
- Mental Health Association of Connecticut
- Oak Hill
- Planned Parenthood of Southern New England
- The Connection, Inc.
- Wheeler Clinic

The Connecticut Nonprofit Human Services Cabinet is a statewide coalition comprised of 20 nonprofit human service associations and organizations representing approximately 800 providers. Its mission is to advance a strong and unified nonprofit human services system to effectively meet community needs. Members play a vital role in addressing the critical health and human services needs that face so many Connecticut residents – they provide the safety net that *anyone* can find themselves in need of when least expected.

We urge your thoughtful consideration of the LIHEAP Block Grant allocation plan developed by the Department of Social Services (DSS) and caution you not to leave Connecticut's low-income households in jeopardy of massive utility shut-offs in the spring without a clear plan for how to handle it.

The estimated FFY12 funding level for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) Block Grant is \$46.4 million. This is a significant reduction over last year's allocation and a result of proposed reductions on the federal level – 50% reduction proposed by the President and a 25% reduction proposed by the Senate Appropriations Committee. This reduction will have devastating effects here in Connecticut.

The DSS block grant proposal will result in over 85,100 low income households losing their winter heating assistance. The proposal reduces the eligibility level for assistance by about half (from 60% of the state median income to 150% of the Federal Poverty Level) and does not include any benefit for utility heated households, such as those heated by electricity or natural gas. Instead, to meet the challenges of reduced federal funding, DSS plans to only provide heating assistance to those households heated by deliverable fuel, such as oil or propane.

While recognizing that no plan can be ideal when facing a reduction in federal funding of this magnitude, the current DSS plan presents a serious problem for households with electric or natural gas heat. Although Connecticut state law provides protections for utility heated households that prohibit electricity and natural gas suppliers from shutting off the utilities during the winter months because of non-payment, it doesn't change what the outcome will be in May.

We understand the severity of the problem that DSS is facing, but the current plan will result in massive utility shut-offs in the spring and the state needs to have a plan for how it will handle that situation. As policymakers and advocates continue advocating on the federal level for full funding of LIHEAP, we must also have a complete plan that not only deals with allocating reduced federal heating aid, but also the negative consequences of leaving out utility heated households that will occur down the road.

Again, we urge you to ensure that all of Connecticut's low-income households will be protected this winter and not forced to endure utility shut-offs in the spring.

*For questions, please contact Liza Andrews, Project Director, at [landrews@humanservicescabinet.org](mailto:landrews@humanservicescabinet.org).*