



Operation Fuel, Inc.

WE'RE ALL PART OF THE OPERATION.

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Good afternoon chairs and members of the Appropriations, Energy and Technology, and Human Services Committees. My name is Patricia Wrice; I am executive director of Operation Fuel. Operation Fuel is a private statewide non-profit organization that provides emergency energy assistance to low-income working households that are not eligible or have exhausted their benefits from the state energy programs. I am also a member of the Governor's Low Income Energy Advisory Board.

Last year, thousands of Connecticut residents found themselves facing energy emergencies – many for the first time. And we responded with everything we had. To help keep homes warm and lights on, our 100+ fuel banks across the state worked tirelessly to distribute every available emergency energy assistance dollar. All told, Operation Fuel provided \$1.75 million in emergency energy assistance to more than 5,000 households and 17,000 individuals.

All the forecasts for this coming winter paint a grim picture for Connecticut's low-income families. We understand the LIHEAP funding for energy assistance is projected to be reduced 50% from last year. With these potential cuts, more pressure will be put on Operation Fuel to make up the financial difference. There is no way Operation Fuel, with private funding and budgeted state assistance has the resources to make up for the loss of aid to electric and gas users.

While we understand that cuts have to be made, we are concerned that cuts are being made that put our most vulnerable households' stability in jeopardy. We are concerned that there will be nowhere for people to turn in May when their utilities are shut off.

Operation Fuel supports the position of the Low Income Energy Advisory Board to make the following changes to the plan:

- Maintain the FFY 11 LIHEAP program structure and program eligibility levels and plan for reduced benefits by creating a three-tiered approach to allow the program to modify benefit levels based on federal and potential state-appropriated funds.
- Modify the start date for CEAP fuel authorizations from November 15 to November 1
- Commit state-appropriated funds to supplement federal funds allocated for administrative costs to the Community Action agencies and other qualified entities to administer the program.
- Commit state-appropriated funds to supplement federal funds for the overall operation of CEAP (CT Energy Assistance Program).

We need our state legislators to approve a plan that is fair and equitable to thousands of vulnerable households no matter what their source of heat is. We also are requesting that Connecticut find funding to supplement the loss of federal dollars if necessary. Thank you.