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**Testimony in Support of the LIHEAP Funding and Energy Assistance
Appropriations, Energy & Technology, and Human Services Committees
Public Hearing, September 27, 2011**

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, Senator Fonfara, Representative Nardello, Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak and members of the Appropriations, Energy and Human Services Committees,

My name is Mary Bois, and I am from Kensington, CT. I am 64 years old, and have been living with multiple sclerosis for almost 30 years.

Initially when I developed MS, I was able to manage the heat sensitivity and cold without major problems. However, for the past 20 years I have struggled with disease progression and must maintain my body temperature using heating and cooling ventilation systems.

I need to have air conditioning in my home to deal with the summer heat. The winter cold makes my MS symptoms worse, I adjust with warmer clothing and outerwear, but the need for energy use is constant.

As an MS Support Group Leader for the Middletown MS Support Group, I am in contact with members who are having difficulty with their energy bills. Heating assistance is available through cities and towns and applications must go through social service organizations. It is a tedious process, providing proof of income, and energy bills, etc. However this is a benefit much needed by the MS population, and others.

The income limits for recipients, currently 60% of the median income in Connecticut are being reduced to 150% of the federal poverty level. This will cause people to choose between medicine, food and heat.

Please see reverse side...

The new fuel assistance rules will only apply to deliverable fuels such as heating oil or propane but not to natural gas or electric heat. These cutbacks are drastic and will affect the people least able to deal with them.

Many people with autoimmune diseases such as MS and lupus have gone through the loss of jobs, homes and bankruptcy. They live in a constant state of uncertainty as to the availability of medications, housing and basic necessities.

I would ask that members of the committees and the legislature to adopt the Low Income Energy Advisory Board's (LIEAB) recommendations instead of the block grant proposal.

The recommendations are to:

- Maintain energy assistance for utility heated households and renters up to 60% SMI
- Maintain last winter's program structure and income eligibility levels, with a three-tiered benefit schedule. Allows the program to modify benefits based on actual federal and potential state-appropriated funds. This means the plan would include benefits for households with income up to 60% SMI, provides benefits regardless of heating sources and includes a benefit for renters.
- Follow last winter's program time table for benefits (fuel delivery period: Nov. 1 to and mid-March) and application deadlines (Nov. 1 through beginning of May, extended to mid-May for utility heated households with a shut-off notice).
- Commit state funds to:
 - Ensure adequate administrative funding for Community Action Agencies and other qualified entities to administer the program; and
 - Supplement federal funds available for energy assistance benefits.

Thank you.

Mary Bois