



National  
Multiple Sclerosis  
Society

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**Appropriations Committee Public Hearing - February 15, 2012**  
**Testimony in Support of Funding for Operation Fuel, Year-round Energy Assistance and Supportive Housing**

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Walker, Senator Duff, Representative Hurlburt, Senator Markley, Rep. Miner and Distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Susan Raimondo and I am the Senior Director of Advocacy and Programs for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Connecticut Chapter. The National MS Society has offices in Hartford and Norwalk. We serve over 6,000 individuals living with multiple sclerosis and their families in Connecticut.

First we want to thank the General Assembly and the Administration for their ongoing support of Operation Fuel, Year-Round Energy Assistance and Supportive Housing. All of these issues are of critical importance for individuals with MS and their families.

We are here to ask the Appropriations Committee to approve increasing the funds for Operation Fuel by \$2.2 million. These funds will help offset the \$32.5 million reduction in Federal Energy Assistance, and help keep the heat and lights on for affected households.

We are also here to share our perspective on the need for affordable accessible housing, including supportive housing. Multiple sclerosis is an extremely unpredictable disease, but those living with MS can anticipate a lifetime of high medical costs associated with medications, doctor and hospital bills and medical equipment to manage the disease and its symptoms. Though the cost of managing MS is high, those with the disease also face the loss of income earning potential due to disease progression over time. If disease progression includes diminished mobility, the financial burden further escalates if a different living environment is needed to maintain independence, connection to community and family, or quality of life.

People with MS have a range of housing needs. For some individuals a home modification, assistive technology or moving to a wheelchair-accessible home may suffice, while others with more significant disease progression may need accessible environments coupled with alternative or supportive care. All of these changes to living arrangements come at significant expense, often unaffordable to many people with MS already struggling from the financial burdens of the disease.

The security of having an affordable, accessible place to live is vital for people with MS and other Connecticut residents who live with disabilities. Having stable housing decreases stress, increases quality of life, and promotes independence by allowing people to live productively in their communities – instead of long-term care facilities – for as long as possible.

We want to encourage the Legislature and Administration to focus on the needs of the entire community as they implement their long-term commitment to affordable housing. People of all ages, and all abilities have similar needs and when creating opportunities for individuals and their families please insure that they are affordable and accessible.

Thank you.