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

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

My name is Lisa Fine and I am a resident of Manchester. I am an individual living with multiple sclerosis and insulin dependent diabetes, my boyfriend is on dialysis and is waiting for a kidney transplant. We rent the first floor of an old house in Manchester.

I am here this evening to thank you for your past support of Operation Fuel and to ask for your support of increasing funds for Operation Fuel by \$2.2 million to insure that more families will have access to year-round energy assistance.

We are struggling, like many, to afford our energy costs. We both receive Social Security Disability Insurance payments and we each work part-time jobs to make ends-meet (although my boyfriend was just laid off.) I contacted the Community Renewal Team earlier this winter to apply for LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) funding; I was told that our household exceeded the income allowable. This was very concerning because there is so much more to our story than merely our income; our medical bills are exorbitant and because of our medical conditions we must follow strict diets and our food is terribly expensive.

We have been borrowing money to pay our oil bills. We keep our home at a constant 58 degrees. We try to dress in layers but it is very difficult, when Andy comes home from dialysis, he is exhausted and very weak. I have severe pain from my multiple sclerosis and diabetes; wearing layers causes increased symptoms of my MS and the pain is excruciating.

Since Andy and I both live with severe chronic illnesses, we need access to not only heating but also cooling. As a person with MS, I need air conditioning as a medical necessity. My physician continues to complete paperwork necessary for shut off protection, but I still must pay the bills. Although I have an air conditioner, I am deathly afraid of running it because of the cost of the electricity. When I get too warm, I cannot walk without falling, my vision becomes blurred, my speech is slurred and my cognition is impaired; all of which makes it very difficult for me to do my job.

If we are able to receive energy assistance, this would maximize our independence. We are an example of why year-round energy assistance is critical for families.

In Connecticut, state and federal funds only cover the costs of winter heating for low income residents. There are no government funds available to assist families with keeping the lights on, maintaining hot water for bathing, refrigeration or cooling. Operation Fuel is Connecticut's only source of year-round energy assistance.

Please include increasing funds for Operation Fuel by \$2.2 million to insure that more families will have access to year-round energy assistance

Thank you.