



**October 1, 2012 Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly
Appropriations, Human Services, and Energy & Technology Committees**

**LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (LIHEAP)
BLOCK GRANT ALLOCATION PLAN FFY 2013**

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members of the Appropriations, Human Services, and Energy & Technology Committees:

Thank you for holding this hearing on the proposed Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) Block Grant Allocation Plan for FFY 2012/2013. My name is James H. Gatling, Ph.D. I am the President/CEO of New Opportunities, Inc. and the Board Chair of the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA). As you know, CAFCA is the state association for Connecticut's Community Action Agencies—our state's federally-designated anti-poverty agencies, which serve every one of Connecticut's 169 towns and cities.

We want to thank you and Governor Malloy for strongly advocating for this critical program and thank Commissioner Roderick Bremby for his ongoing support and that of his staff at the Department of Social Services. We would particularly like to thank Thomas O'Brien, DSS Public Assistance Consultant for his tireless and supportive work on the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program. Year after year, Tom has been a valued partner and advocate for CEAP and a supporter of the CAAs and the frontline staff of this program. He truly understands the challenges faced by our agencies as we process over 150,000 customers' energy related interactions each energy season and certify over 100,000 CEAP applications.

CAFCA supports the CEAP 2012/2013 Allocation Plan for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program Block Grant. However, due to the ongoing funding uncertainties at the federal level, we would like to take this opportunity to strongly suggest that the state legislature and the administration begin having discussions regarding supplemental state funding for energy assistance if federal funds do not meet the need of our citizens this winter, especially if we experience an especially cold winter – we were very lucky last year.

And, as you all know, in Connecticut the recession is still going strong. Our statewide network of Community Action Agencies (CAAs) can attest to the great need in our communities where many people who have never asked for assistance before are living from one uncertain, unemployment benefit check to the next. Many of our customers do not even have these checks to count on. Many of our elderly on fixed incomes are seeing their retirement benefits dwindle from quarter to quarter. Data reported in the "Home Energy Affordability Gap: 2010" study reveals that Connecticut's poorest households spend more than 70% of their annual income on their home energy bills.¹

¹ Operation Fuel. "Home Energy Affordability Gap: 2010, Connecticut Legislative Districts." January 2011.

So the reality is that the energy assistance is not just important, but essential to keeping struggling families safe and housed. And, speaking of safety, another issue that has all of our agencies concerned, is the huge increase in utility shutoffs over the past several months. It has been more difficult than ever to get our customers reconnected and maintained in a safe and secure manner and the financial demands on these struggling families for reconnection services have been almost impossible to negotiate. I know utility shutoffs are not the subject matter of this hearing but I would be remiss by not informing you of these serious problems for our customers and your constituents. We have never had such problems in the past and hope something can be done to rectify an ongoing critical situation. The more energy assistance funding is cut and its capacity diminished, the more the State limits families' spending on other essential items such as food, health care, and housing and drives families to use dangerous shortcuts in an attempt to live within their very limited means. There are also other potential unintended consequences such as DCF being contacted to remove children from a home if the home does not have heat and/or utilities.

At these hearings in the past, we have lauded Connecticut's Federal legislators for ensuring appropriate funding levels for the LIHEAP Block Grant. We remain grateful to those leaders, who have protected the fundamental human rights of low-income households and ask them to continue being leaders in the fight to preserve LIHEAP funding. But, I ask you today to begin planning for the worst case scenario if federal funds are reduced.

We will continue to seek funding at the federal level. However, we call on the legislature and the administration to make certain that home energy assistance keeps the older adult and persons with disabilities independent and out of nursing homes; that home energy assistance keeps low income families in their homes and not homeless; and that home energy assistance provides for the health and safety of Connecticut's children.

Thank you for your ongoing leadership and support for this very important program.