



**September 25, 2013 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 2013/2014**

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 2013/2014. My name is James H. Gatling, Ph.D. I am the President/CEO of New Opportunities, Inc. and the Board Chairman of the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA). As you know, CAFCA is the state association for Connecticut's eleven (11) Community Action Agencies (CAAs)—our state's federally-designated anti-poverty agencies, which serve every one of Connecticut's 169 towns and cities.

Each year, the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP) helps thousands of Connecticut families pay their heating bills and avoid energy crises. We would like to thank you and Governor Malloy for strongly advocating for this critical program, and thank Commissioner Bremby for his ongoing support and that of his staff at the Department of Social Services.

Our statewide network of CAAs can attest to the great need for energy assistance in communities across Connecticut where many people who have never asked for assistance before are coming to our doors for help. In 2012, our CAA network reported that 132,575 households avoided crises with energy assistance, and we processed over 110,000 CEAP applications (FY 2012/2013 data is available on page 3). The financial burden low-income families face each winter season as they struggle to pay their heating bills is extremely high. Data reported in the most recent "Home Energy Affordability Gap: Connecticut (2012)" study reveals that on a statewide basis, households with incomes at or below 50% of the Federal Poverty Level experience energy burdens of over 50% of their income. The average burden in dollar terms is more than \$3,000 per household.¹ This constant struggle not only affects low-income families' ability to heat their home, but puts them in a position that could compromise the health and well-being of all members.

Although the LIHEAP program is designed to assist low-income families with their heating bills, it does much more to positively impact families' overall health. Low-income families face many costs that are unavoidable in order to maintain their living situation and keep a

¹ Operation Fuel. "Home Energy Affordability In Connecticut: The Affordability Gap (2010)" December 2012.

roof over their head. For example, rent has to be paid, or the family will become evicted. Child care and car bills have to be paid or jobs will be lost. This forces families to alter their budget in order to meet other pressing needs in addition to heating their home. And so, especially in the winter months, many low-income families in energy crises are forced to turn to one of the only parts of their budget that is flexible in order to pay their heating bill: the food budget. This is known, and has been known, to doctors and researchers as the “heat or eat” dilemma². Forced to choose between these two essential necessities, many low-income families go without one or the other.

This tradeoff poses a real challenge and significant threat for families. According to Dr. Deborah A. Frank, Director of The Grow Clinic for Children at the Boston Medical Center, and Founder and Principle Investigator of Children’s Health Watch, “We define energy security as follows: Household Energy Security (HES) is consistent access to enough of the kinds of energy needed for a healthy and safe life in the geographic area where a household is located. An energy-secure household's members are able to obtain the energy needed to heat/cool their home and operate lighting, refrigeration and appliances while maintaining expenditures for other necessities (e.g., rent, food, clothing, transportation, child care, medical care, etc.). A household experiences energy insecurity (HEI) when it lacks consistent access to the amount or the kind of energy needed for a healthy and safe life for its members.” The LIHEAP program provides the essential support low-income families need to ensure they never have to choose between heating their home and or putting food on the table, or endangering their family with hazardous methods of heating their home such as space heaters or other appliances.

Despite the clear need for the LIHEAP program in our communities, times have never been more challenging than they are today. The current budget gridlock in Congress and the effects of sequestration continue to have a devastating impact on domestic programs in Connecticut and across the country. Looking into the future it is clear that many, if not all, of the programs and services our CAAs provide to the state’s most vulnerable residents remain in jeopardy. Although we remain uncertain about a final funding allocation for the LIHEAP program, we would like to commend Commissioner Bremby and DSS for basing CEAP funding on the most optimistic situation. Not only has the Department presented an allocation plan with funding to a program that has proven benefits to all categories of constituents, but with carryover funds from previous years and the assumed funding from Congress, DSS has managed to provide benefits with a slight increase from last year. And so, we are very pleased to be here to support the Department’s CEAP 2013/2014 Allocation Plan for the LIHEAP Block Grant.

Energy assistance is not just important, but *essential* to keeping struggling families safe and housed. And so, we would also like to recognize and praise Connecticut’s federal delegation for continuing to fight for appropriate funding levels for the LIHEAP Block Grant and remain hopeful that LIHEAP funding will be preserved, given that no funding level for FFY14 has been decided.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I am happy to take any questions you may have.

² Food and Research Action Center (FRAC). “Heat and Eat” (March 2009). Available at: http://frac.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/heat_and_eat09.pdf

Chart 1: Recession CEAP/CHAP *Total* Caseload Comparison

Agency	<u>2012/2013</u> <u>(7/8/2013)</u>	<u>2007/2008</u> <u>(Final)</u>
ABCD (Bridgeport)	10,925	10,872
BCO (Bristol)	3,436	2,818
CACD (Danbury)	4,762	3,324
CRT (Hartford/Middletown)	29,028	26,410
TEAM (Derby)	4,080	3,603
HRAofNB (New Britain)	4,262	4,231
CAAofNH (New Haven)	12,412	12,332
NEON (Norwalk)	5,214	3,898
TVCCA (Norwich)	9,470	6,734
NO (Waterbury/Meriden)	23,171	18,898
ACCESS (Willimantic)	8,105	6,493
Statewide Totals:	114,865	99,613

Data from DSS

Chart 2: Recession CEAP/CHAP *Eligible* Caseload Comparison

Agency	<u>2012/2013</u> <u>(7/8/2013)</u>	<u>2007/2008</u> <u>(Final)</u>
ABCD (Bridgeport)	9,856	8,817
BCO (Bristol)	2,806	2,317
CACD (Danbury)	4,088	3,053
CRT (Hartford/Middletown)	25,141	22,893
TEAM (Derby)	3,520	3,010
HRAofNB (New Britain)	3,394	3,187
CAAofNH (New Haven)	10,464	10,332
NEON (Norwalk)	4,447	3,261
TVCCA (Norwich)	8,321	6,046
NO (Waterbury/Meriden)	21,198	17,356
ACCESS (Willimantic)	7,474	5,855
Statewide Totals:	100,709	86,127

Data from DSS