

Jennifer Castonguay
78 Mines Rd. Bristol Ct.
860-585-8821

jenncastonguay@yahoo.com

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Good evening Senator Crisco, Representative Nicastro and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Jennifer Castonguay and I would like to start by saying thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this evening. Additionally I would like to extend my appreciation to Governor Malloy and the legislature for their long standing support of year-round energy assistance and Operation Fuel. The heating assistance it provides to thousands of families in our state is invaluable. I would also like to thank you for air conditioning. Yes it is a strange thing to be thankful for while it is about 19 degrees outside, but I will elaborate in a moment.

I was raised and currently live in Bristol, and have been living with my family and my diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis since 2003. Since I am no longer able to work and am on a fixed income, energy assistance to families like mine is essential to our health, both in winter and summer when the temps and humidity rise.

My request for the committee is to support the funding for Operation Fuel at \$2.2 million to insure that families will have access to year-round energy assistance. That is heating and cooling cost. Cooling cost you may ask? Yes, because for residents living with chronic illnesses like multiple sclerosis, it is a medical necessity.

So now back to that air conditioning topic. I need it. Not because it is a nice convenience, but I physically can't allow my body to overheat. Air conditioning is a medical necessity. It is a perplexing idea, but it is my reality.

My MS symptoms increase drastically when my body is too warm. In higher temperatures I experience increased weakness and numbness in my hands, numbness and stiffness in my legs and feet. I suffer more from extreme fatigue, increases in forgetfulness, and more cognitive issues when my body temperature is elevated. One of the most debilitating results of exposure to extreme heat is an increase in my severe nerve pain. When my nerves flare up in the heat, I experience sensations of tingling, burning, even sharp stabbing pains throughout my entire body. The unfortunate reality is that any MS symptom

can be exacerbated by heat. In some situations, new symptoms can present themselves as a result of higher temperatures.

Heat or high humidity often makes individuals with MS experience a significant worsening of their symptoms. Not only does weather impact me, but daily activities such as taking a bath or shower in water that is too warm for too long, or just sitting in a hot tub can trigger the same results. Doctors assert that this “pseudo-exacerbation” of symptoms results from the high temperatures causing nerves, whose myelin covering has been damaged or destroyed, to conduct electrical signals even less efficiently than in cooler temperatures.

So as pleasant for you as it may be to think of laying in the sun to get a tan, taking a nap at the beach, or even a family reunion picnic at the lake these are not always agreeable activities, because all I would be thinking is how warm is it going to get, how long before my symptoms get too bad, and how can I cool down.

Operation Fuel is the only source of funds for year-round energy assistance. 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. The ability to have access to year-round energy assistance would make a substantial difference in my life and the lives of others for whom air conditioning is not a mere luxury, but a medical necessity.

This is why it is so crucial to fund Operation Fuel at the 2.2 million level.

Thank you and good night.

Jennifer Castonguay