



Operation Fuel, Inc.

WE'RE ALL PART OF THE OPERATION.

Testimony of Patricia Wrice
Executive Director

February 10, 2014

Good evening Senator Bye and Representative Walker and Senator Duff and Representative Flexer co-chairs and members of the Conservation and Development subcommittee. My name is Patricia Wrice, executive director of Operation Fuel. I want to thank the Governor and the Appropriations Committee for awarding Operation Fuel \$1.1 million to provide emergency energy assistance to Connecticut's vulnerable families and seniors. In addition, I want to thank both the Appropriations Committee and the Chairs of the Regulation and Protection Subcommittee for the allocation of \$1 million from the systems benefit charge last year. I am speaking in support of Section 2 of SB 21 that assures \$1.1 million annually for Operation Fuel from the Systems Benefit Charge.

Operation Fuel is a private statewide non-profit organization that provides emergency energy assistance to low-income working, elderly and disabled households that are not eligible or have exhausted their benefits from the state energy programs. Operation Fuel provides a maximum of \$500 per household which only gives a family a little over 100 gals of fuel. This year in anticipation of a cold winter and less funding, Operation Fuel needed to make tough decisions on how we could maximize our limited funding. Priority was given to households not eligible for government funds-including many elderly and disable and to those served under the current

CHAP program – families whose incomes were between 151% of the Federal Poverty guidelines – 60% of State median household income. We know those ineligible are only served by private funds and those in CHAP would only receive \$410 in benefits and have no place to turn for help when their benefits are exhausted. Operation Fuel allocated \$1.84 million for its winter program. As of Friday, February 7, \$1.3 million has already been committed. So far this winter, we have provided assistance to 7547 households representing 6512 individuals—2255 are children and 753 are elderly. We are averaging 80 to 100 applications a day. At this rate, all our winter funds will be expended by the end of February. Many of our local fuel banks have stopped accepting applications because they have run out funds.

Operation Fuel utilizes a network of more than 100 fuel banks across the state to serve low-income households. We work very closely with the Community Action Agencies to help ensure families are utilizing the State Program before coming to Operation Fuel. Most of the CAAS are local fuel bank sites.

We all know that energy costs in Connecticut continue to be among the highest in the nation, and they continue to increase at a rate that far outpaces families' abilities to keep up... As a result, more families are at risk of having to make choices between adequate nutrition, medical care, housing, and other basic necessities in order to pay home energy bills.

Thank you for your time today. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Patricia Wrice