



Operation Fuel, Inc.

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One Regency Drive
Suite 200
Bloomfield, CT 06002
(860) 243-2345
(860) 726-9310
www.operationfuel.org

**Testimony of Brenda Watson
Director of Community Programs
An Act Concerning Fraud Prevention in Connecticut's Utility
Termination Protection Programs
February 20, 2014**

Good morning members of the Energy and Technology Committee. My name is Brenda Watson and I am the director of community programs for Operation Fuel. I want to thank all of the committee members and staff for conducting this informational hearing on An Act Concerning Fraud Prevention in Connecticut's Utility Termination Protection Programs

Energy affordability continues to elude Connecticut's most vulnerable households. The gap between what households can afford to pay and their actual energy costs, places an unfair burden on those who could least afford it. 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.

We are grateful for the many low income programs that our state utilities offer to families that are struggling financially. Where these programs are not perfect, they are in place for a reason. Consideration should be made to improve existing programs that help struggling residents, not make them worse. Enrolling in the medical protection program as it exists now is not as easy as one may think and passing this bill into law would make it even more difficult. We have provided grants to people who while in the process of applying for medical protection, pay what they can to keep the power on as having electricity is a matter of life and death for themselves or loved one in the home.

No one other than a person's medical provider should be allowed to determine a patient's illness as serious or life threatening. Some people that we help need oxygen tanks or need refrigeration for vital medication. Some have disabling conditions like MS or emphysema that are vulnerable to extreme heat or cold.

This bill will set vulnerable households back. We are requesting that this bill be rejected and if the utilities are interested in re-shaping their existing low income and medical protection programs, I encourage them to seek the advice of organizations like ours, AARP, Community Action Agencies and others, to help guide them in the process.

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