

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE ENERGY & TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE  
Senator Martin M. Looney  
March 17, 2015

**In support of S.B. 565, An Act Concerning Energy Audits and Heating Assistance**

Good afternoon Senator Doyle, Representative Reed, and members of the Energy & Technology Committee. My name is Martin M. Looney, state senator for the 11<sup>th</sup> District, which includes the communities of New Haven, Hamden and North Haven. I come before you today in support of Senate Bill 565, legislation aimed at improving the lives of the 305,000 Connecticut families who currently struggle to pay their winter heating bills.

For many years the non-profit organization Operation Fuel has documented a growing “energy affordability gap” in Connecticut—the difference between what it costs to provide winter heating for a household, and what households can afford to pay. The group’s 2014 Home Energy Affordability Gap Study reports that the number of households which fall into this gap, and are unable to affordably heat their homes, has grown by an alarming 32 percent since 2011.

According to that study, the annual shortfall between actual and affordable home energy bills for households at or below 200% of the federal poverty level now reaches nearly \$2,560 per household—totaling \$784 million statewide.

Despite the great need for additional home heating assistance, state and federal combined aid for home heating has been falling. The federal LIHEAP block grant to the State of Connecticut (which funds the state’s Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP) and the Contingency Heating Assistance Program (CHAP)) fell by nearly \$5.5 million for this winter, even as the need for assistance continued to increase. Operation Fuel estimates that Connecticut’s LIHEAP allocation for this winter was sufficient to cover only 9 percent of the state’s energy affordability gap.

Given the difficult choices Connecticut faces in the current budget year, it is not likely that additional funds will soon be available to increase direct home heating assistance. However, it is within our power to closely examine other state initiatives that may be able to help address the gap at current funding levels, if their efforts were better coordinated.

Connecticut’s electric ratepayers currently support home weatherization and energy audits that are provided free of charge to low-income households through the Home Energy Solutions – Income Eligible (HES-IE) program. It so happens that all individuals who meet the income requirements for LIHEAP heating assistance in Connecticut also meet the income requirements for the HES-IE program.

In 2014 the HES-IE program supported 29,890 home energy audits, which provided an average annual savings of \$318 to \$629 per household depending on heating fuel type. For a family struggling to pay their winter heating bills, this is a very significant level of annual savings, which they will continue to realize as long as they inhabit the audited housing unit.

Senate Bill 565 aims to facilitate the performance of energy audits for as many households who receive state-supported home heating assistance as possible. The bill would create a streamlined, electronically managed and uniform application for all of Connecticut's home heating assistance and energy audit programs, which would also be accessible to applicants online.

Making this application electronic would allow for caseworkers who process home heating applications to instantly check if an applicant's current housing unit has received an energy audit in recent years, and to expedite the scheduling of an HES-IE energy audit if none has previously been performed.

The bill also provides for notification to renters who apply for energy audits of their rights under the law as tenants, to help ensure that even if a landlord refuses to allow performance of an audit, the maximum level of services still allowed under current law (including installation of weather stripping and insulation of hot water tanks) will still be carried out. Even a fractional amount of annual savings can mean quite a lot to families in need.

The efficient coordination of home energy audits and home heating assistance is no small task, and it will involve, among others, the cooperative efforts of the Department of Social Services (DSS), the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP), the Connecticut Energy Efficiency Board (EEB), Eversource Energy, United Illuminating, Operation Fuel, and representatives of the state's many hardworking Community Action Agencies—who are absolutely essential to the front-line operation of both categories of programs.

Coordinating the actions of so many entities, each with their own priorities and methods, is no simple task. Yet in pursuing this goal, the opportunity exists to do a great deal of good for the thousands of Connecticut families now struggling to pay their heating bills. By working together with all stakeholders and interested parties, I believe we can make a significant difference, and I would welcome thoughts and input from all on how this best can be achieved.

Thank you very much for your time and your attention to this important issue.