

Testimony in Support of the Proposed FFY17 LIHEAP Allocation Plan  
August 31, 2016

By Karen Adamson, Executive Director, Operation Fuel

***ON BEHALF OF THE LOW INCOME ENERGY ADVISORY BOARD***

Greetings honorable leaders and members of the Appropriations, Human Services and Energy and Technology Committees. My name is Karen Adamson and I am the new Executive Director of Operation Fuel. I look forward to getting to know you in that capacity. Today, however, I am here on behalf of the Low Income Energy Advisory Board which advises the planning, development, implementation and coordination of energy-assistance-related programs and policies and low-income weatherization assistance programs and policies. The Low Income Energy Advisory Board submits this testimony in support of the Proposed Federal Fiscal Year 2017 LIHEAP Allocation Plan.

DSS staff have taken the input of the Low Income Energy Advisory Board in the development of the plan and have been excellent about sharing information with us. The Board unanimously approved support of the proposal at our last meeting on August 3, 2016.

As you know, the Plan assumes that the block grant amount will be level funded. Here are some of the key highlights of the plan, as laid out by DSS:

- Basic Benefits for Vulnerable Households were increased by \$5 at all levels. Vulnerable households are those in which one or more members is either elderly (60 years of age or older), under age six or disable. Non-Vulnerable Basic Benefits and Crisis Assistance Benefits are unchanged.
- Safety Net Benefits, at \$415 per authorization, remain the same as last year's levels, which means up to two authorizations for Non-Vulnerable deliverable fuel heated households receiving a Level 1 – Level 4 benefit, and up to three for Vulnerable households at Levels 1 – Level 4. Households receiving a Level 5 Basic Benefit are not eligible for Safety Net benefits.
- In FFY 2017, \$1 million is available to provide repairs or replacement of heating systems for single family, owner occupied dwellings that are determined to be unsafe or inoperable. Vendors performing the work will be selected competitively. These funds will be available to eligible homeowners receiving a Level 1 through Level 4 Basic Benefit, with a priority for vulnerable households.

- The funding designated for heating system repair/replacement will also be used to cover costs for clean, tune and test of heating systems and will no longer be charged to the household's Basic Benefit award.
- Community Action Agencies will not issue an authorization for a fuel delivery in cases where heating systems, including leaking fuel tanks, have been 'red tagged' by a vendor certified to evaluate heating systems.
- \$1 million of LIHEAP funding will be provided to DEEP to assist with weatherization services to CEAP eligible households. The funds will be used to address health and safety measures for the provision of weatherization services and will be in compliance with the U.S. Department of Energy's Weatherization requirements. CEAP eligible households that receive these services will also receive DOE funded weatherization services.
- Rental Assistance Benefits have been added to Levels 4 and 5. This provides direct cash assistance to rental households that do not make direct-to-vendor payment for primary heat, have income up to 60 percent of median income and pay more than 30 percent of their income towards rent.
- A LIHEAP SNAP benefit of \$20.01 will continue to be issued to households that do not make direct-to-vendor payments for their heat, have a shelter and/or utility obligation and pay thirty percent or less of their gross income toward rent.

The Low Income Energy Advisory Board looks forward to this proposed plan being approved by the Committees of cognizance and working with you in the future.

Thank you.