



Energy and Technology Committee Public Hearing Tuesday, February 18, 2025
Submitted by Mike Turaj, Public Affairs & Policy Advisor, Operation Fuel, Inc.

Dear Co-Chairs Rep. Steinberg, Sen. Needleman, Ranking Members Rep. Marra, Sen. Fazio, Vice-Chairs Rep. Sanchez and Sen. Maroney, and Honorable Members of the Energy and Technology Committee:

Operation Fuel Supports H.B. 6926- An Act Concerning Funding For The Residential Energy Preparation Service Program

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of Operation Fuel, in support of [H.B. 6926](#), An Act Concerning Funding For The Residential Energy Preparation Service Program (REPS). Operation Fuel is a 501(c)3 private nonprofit founded in 1977 during the oil embargo, when energy price shocks destabilized household budgets and the national economy. Today, we continue to provide emergency energy and utility assistance to low-and moderate-income Connecticut households experiencing financial crisis.

As we read H.B. 6926, this bill would allocate \$8 million from the general fund to supplement the already appropriated \$500,000 from the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) Block Grant¹, approved by the Connecticut General Assembly on August 13, 2024. The funds would go to the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to support the Residential Energy Preparation Service (REPS)² program, which removes health and safety barriers from income-eligible households to maintain healthy and safe living conditions. Remediating barriers to weatherization such as mold and asbestos enables residents to take full advantage of our state's energy efficiency incentives to reduce their energy use and bills.

Connecticut ratepayers engage with our state's energy efficiency services by accessing www.energizect.com or calling 1-800-WISE-USE. The program starts with an energy audit, then contractors follow up with weatherization and efficiency measures such as improved insulation, upgrades to more efficient appliances, and window treatments. The investor-owned utility companies, Eversource and Avangrid, manage projects and contractors in their respective service territories. Low-income ratepayers, earning 60% State Median Income and below, qualify for additional incentives through Home Energy Solutions-Income Eligible (HES-IE) program.

DEEP and contractor data analysis provided in public meetings and documents since 2020 indicates that up to 30% of low-and moderate-income homes can't take full advantage of energy

¹ <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/departments-and-agencies/dss/winter-heating-assistance/as-approved-ffy-2025-liheap-allocation-plan.pdf?rev=67c47789b9fe422e96c849f09325b5d8&hash=E0E02B79BD2BEE28EF5E7DE107E73384>

² <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Energy/Conservation-and-Load-Management/Weatherization-Barrier-Mitigation>



efficiency services - *which we all pay into via our electric bills* - due to weatherization barriers that prevent further upgrades. This is why the state created the REPS program. A few years in, we need more investment to ensure we aren't continuing to defer health and safety improvements in our state's oldest and most disinvested housing stock.

DEEP launched³ the REPS program in 2023, engaging the International Center for Appropriate and Sustainable Technology (ICAST) as lead contractor. ICAST follows up with clients deferred from HES-IE due to health and safety barriers in their homes. REPS is the first step many households need **as homes cannot be properly weatherized without first removing harmful health barriers, such as asbestos, mold, vermiculite insulation, knob-and-tube wiring** – which data from DEEP indicates includes up to 30% of our state's low- and moderate-income households. Following the removal of barriers, households can utilize the state-managed Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) or the utility-managed Home Energy Solutions-Income Eligible (HES-IE). These programs administer proper weatherization services that improve home insulation and energy efficiency, leading to healthier living conditions and minimizing leaky drafts. This leads to a lower reliance on energy assistance programs like the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP) and Operation Fuel assistance grants.

Operation Fuel has engaged in building remediation work since 2022, with funding from our generous donors; as well as with limited and sporadic funding from fines incurred by companies regulated by the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA). We partner with Neighborhood Housing Services of New Haven's [I Heart My Home program](#). This past fall, our team supported a New Haven resident who relies on Social Security as her sole income. With limited access to phone, internet, and transportation, she struggled to address serious issues in her home, including a non-functional oil tank, refrigerator, and stove. The client had recently lost her mother and brother, both of whom had lived with her.

Enter Neighborhood Housing Services of New Haven (NHS), and Operation Fuel. The NHS team guided the client every step of the way, securing funding from Home Energy Solutions-Income Eligible (HES-IE). Operation Fuel stepped in to remediate mold in the home, which HES-IE funding doesn't cover. As a result, our partnership facilitated several upgrades to her home including mold remediation, insulation, venting, and the installation of a high-efficiency heat pump. Today, the home has reliable heat and improved air quality, as well as efficient, functional appliances. The project leveraged Operation Fuel's roughly \$7,500 investment to complete a project totaling over \$38,000 in value. We hope the committee and General Assembly will recognize the value in H.B. 6729 – **the \$8 million you allocate today can result in tens of millions in energy, cost, and pollution savings for Connecticut residents.**

³ <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/News-Releases/News-Releases---2023/DEEP-Launches-the-REPS-Program-to-Address-Barriers-to-Weatherization>



As Operation Fuel knows far too well⁴, minimal funding, yet increased demand, results in programs not serving all who seek assistance. The REPS program receives \$500,000 from LIHEAP, which is not adequate for a critical program that helps families stay safe and healthy. Efficiency programs are long-term investments for Connecticut residents to live in more affordable, healthier and safer homes. We support this allocation of \$8 million from the general fund to help the REPS program expand, committing our state to remove harmful toxins and outdated wiring from Connecticut homes.

Appropriating \$8 million for REPS will:

- **Help continue the success of REPS:**⁵ With limited funding, REPS has already prepared 202 homes for weatherization, on track to remediate nearly 400 homes within 12 months. The program has a track record for success, more money will lead to more homes being remediated and weatherized. According to data presented at the Energy Efficiency Board in recent months, REPS must now waitlist hundreds of eligible families, due to lack of funds.
- **Achieve (and possibly exceed) program targets:** According to ICAST, REPS aims to prepare 620 households for weatherization by Fall 2025. Additional funding can help the program set new targets, which means more families being protected from toxins in their homes.
- **Improve CT's old housing stock:** The shortage of affordable and safe housing puts CT lagging behind the country, as one in every ten housing structures was built during or after 2000, the third lowest in the country.⁶ Nearly 42% of the housing in our state was built before 1960; of that percentage, approximately 21% was built in 1939 or earlier. Increasingly, our aging housing stock presents health and safety issues. In homes built before 1980, there is an increased probability of environmental and safety hazards, such as lead-based paints, asbestos and poor ventilation. With increased funding towards the REPS program, households can properly address these hazards harming their family's health and way of life.
- **Improve the health and safety of CT households:** No one wants mold, lead or asbestos in their homes. However, home health hazards are prevalent, especially in low-income communities. Poor housing quality contributes to health problems, such as asthma, chronic respiratory problems or cancer. For low-income households, who struggle even to afford their monthly utility bill, proper remediation and weatherization is impossible, without financial assistance. More funds improves access, limits public health issues and save families exorbitant healthcare costs.
- **Lessen the need for energy assistance:** Requests for Operation Fuel's energy assistance program has hit record demand. During the first seven days of our 2025 Winter Program

⁴ <https://www.ctpublic.org/news/2025-01-27/cts-operation-fuel-flooded-with-requests-for-assistance-as-resources-decrease>

⁵ <https://www.icastusa.org/connecticut-residential-energy-preparation-services-program/>

⁶ <https://ctmirror.org/2024/07/19/ct-among-states-with-lowest-share-of-housing-built-in-21st-century/>



Season, we received approximately 1,950 emergency assistance applications. ***This is the highest demand we have experienced, in the shortest period of time, since our founding in 1977.*** Numerous factors contribute to increased demand, one being poor insulation and drafty homes that send warm or cool air goes right out the window (or door). This drives up the use of energy, which in turn (especially for low-to-moderate income residents) increases the demand for energy assistance. However, once home barriers are properly remediated, households can upgrade insulation and energy-efficient appliances. This drives down energy use, which helps save costs and lowers the need for energy assistance.

- **Help CT meet its Greenhouse Gas (GHG) reduction target and weatherization target:** By 2030, Connecticut is mandated to reduce GHG levels to 45% below 2001 levels and 80% below 2001 levels by 2050. Currently, Connecticut is not on track to achieve these targets.⁷ Connecticut is also behind pace to meet our statutory goal of weatherizing 80% of households by 2030, as laid out in Public Act 11-80.⁸ More funding towards REPS will remove barriers, which unlocks access to energy-efficient appliances through weatherization. This reduces carbon footprint and greenhouse gas output, while helping CT achieve our goals.
- **Benefit the state's workforce and economy:** Increasing funding for REPS will ensure more families can access assistance to remove barriers and weatherize their homes. This will increase the demand for field technicians and installers, attracting skilled workers to Connecticut. Increasing funds for REPS will help Connecticut in job creation, growth and workforce development.

Recognizing that funding is not nearly adequate to meet the emergency heating assistance needs of CT residents in 2025, it is more important than ever that the state of Connecticut invest in programs to help. We all want Connecticut residents to stay warm and comfortable in their homes. In addition to removing toxins from residential buildings across our state, REPS is designed to reduce the need for emergency energy assistance over time. **To meet our state's housing and climate goals, we need to ramp up this work - \$8 million is a good start.**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony. We appreciate your leadership for the residents of Connecticut. We are glad to work with the committee on this and other issues before you.

Sincerely,

Mike Turaj
Public Affairs & Policy Advisor

⁷ <https://portal.ct.gov/dph/newsroom/press-releases---2024/climate-report#:~:text=In%202020%2C%20Connecticut%20met%20an,year%20between%202022%20and%202030.>

⁸ <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2011/act/pa/pdf/2011PA-00080-R00SB-01243-PA.pdf>

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