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MASSCAP, Community Action Agencies Launches Statewide Fuel Assistance Awareness Campaign

Boston, Mass. – October 27, 2017 – The Massachusetts Association of Community Action (MASSCAP), along with several community action agencies, announced today that it is launching a statewide awareness campaign on fuel assistance in advance of the cold weather. The awareness campaign will include the placement of a number of billboards throughout the state highlighting the fact that low income families and individuals can receive home heating help, as well as the launch of a website connected to MASSCAP called heatinghelpma.org, which will provide information for those in need of assistance.



Fuel Assistance Awareness Billboard

“We want to raise awareness of the fuel assistance program to make sure those who need it know how to access it. Winters in New England can be brutal and fuel assistance helps our vulnerable friends and neighbors avoid having to make excruciating decisions related to heating or food or clothes,” said Joe Diamond, MASSCAP’s executive director. “Fuel assistance helps to stabilize a household from an economic point of view, allowing people to focus on the kind of supports and training that lead to economic mobility.”

Fuel Assistance, or the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), is a federal program that helps low income households address energy costs. The program is administered in Massachusetts by a network of 22 community-based organizations, including 20 Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the City of Cambridge, and the New England Farm Workers Council. Together, up to 160,000 households each year are served. The Heating Help billboards will be in an estimated 60 locations around Massachusetts, beginning November 6 and lasting throughout the winter months.

“Community Action Agencies are integral to ensuring that low income families and individuals are able to stay warm during a cold New England winter – this is both a public health and safety issue, as people resort to drastic measures if they don’t have access to heating assistance,” said Clare Higgins,

President, MASSCAP, and Executive Director, Community Action of the Franklin, Hampshire, and North Quabbin Regions (CAFHNQ). “Fuel assistance is a federal program administered by the state Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) in partnership with local agencies, so it is critical that we make sure decision-makers at all levels are aware of how important this program is and how much their constituents, customers, and community are dependent on it.”

The LIHEAP program is crucial not only to help pay for the rising cost of heat during cold New England winters, but also to ensure public safety and health throughout the region. Fuel Assistance recipients are also eligible for the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), a federal program that helps participating households stretch their fuel assistance dollars.

“Fuel assistance allows for a holistic approach to serving households living with low income. Studies by the Boston Medical Center and others have shown that fuel assistance supports the health of children growing up in households that benefit from the program. And most fuel assistance households can access a number of other services like WIC, food stamps and free tax preparation offered by the fuel assistance agency,” said Jim Cuddy, Executive Director, South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC).

The federal Energy Information Administration (EIA) recently projected that there will be a significant rise in the cost of home heating this year because of increasing price of supply and anticipated colder weather. EIA estimates, for instance, there will be 17.2 percent increase in cost of heating oil, from an average \$1,248 to \$1,462.

The Massachusetts Association of Community Action’s 23 private, non-profit human service and advocacy organizations work to administer key anti-poverty programs in every city and town in the Commonwealth. These organizations serve over 600,000 low-income people annually, more than half of them with incomes below 125% of the federal poverty level.

For more than 50 years, Community Action Agencies have been on the front lines of addressing poverty -- administering federal programs, federal community services and community development grants, and state funds. CAAs are economic engines in cities and towns across Massachusetts, providing communities with an annual infusion of over \$500 million in total resources. CAAs generate at least twice that amount helping clients become self-sufficient and productive.

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About MASSCAP

The Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP) is a statewide association of the 23 Community Action Agencies (CAAs) operating in Massachusetts. Through the combined skills and vision of its members, MASSCAP works to enhance the ability of each agency to better serve its clients. We work with the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development and other state agencies to open doors to self-sufficiency for low-income Massachusetts residents.

About Community Action Agencies (CAAs)

Community Action Agencies work to help our most vulnerable populations, especially the poor. Rooted in the communities we serve, we ensure that the basic needs of the poor and vulnerable are met. Our agencies provide basic social safety net services, including administration of services that help mothers and children afford nutritious food, assistance that prevents seniors from going cold in the winter, and centers that provide quality early child care to families. Last year, FY2017, CAAs helped more than 600,000 people in need.

We are also at the forefront of providing vulnerable populations with innovative services that help move individuals and families to economic independence. By employing thousands throughout the state, and by administering services whose funds create an important multiplier effect throughout communities, Community Action Agencies are important economic engines, especially in the Gateway cities of Massachusetts.