



January 8, 2018

Governor Charles Baker  
Office of the Governor, Room 280  
Massachusetts State House  
24 Beacon St.,  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Baker,

On behalf of the Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP) and our 23 member agencies across the Commonwealth, I am writing to respectfully and urgently request that \$25 million for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP – otherwise known as fuel assistance) be included in the next FY 18 Supplemental Budget that you will soon submit to the Legislature.

Prolonged bitterly cold weather and rising heating oil prices have combined to make staying warm this winter a nightmare for tens of thousands of vulnerable households who heat with oil. Particularly at risk are children and seniors across the Commonwealth. In what has literally become a matter of life and death for some, we are asking you and Massachusetts legislators to provide \$25 million in funding to help low-income households heat their homes so that we can avert a public health and safety crisis.

Households that heat with delivered fuels such as home heating oil are particularly vulnerable. At close to \$3 per gallon for heating oil, the fuel assistance benefit will allow oil heat households to cover the cost of 1½ tanks of oil – a real and dangerous problem when it takes 3-4 tanks to get a typical household through tough New England winters. Most of the close to 40,000 oil heat households have exhausted their fuel assistance benefit and all will have exhausted it by the end of January, leaving them in a perilous position for the rest of the winter. When temperatures are below 10 degrees, heating systems run virtually non-stop. As a result, a household could go through 100 gallons in less than a week, maybe just 4 days.

An immediate state allocation of \$25 million would help oil heat households get past January and into February. Now is the time to act, before we see any families experiencing serious harm. Vulnerable households faced with limited ability to cover heating costs may also engage in dangerous alternative heating approaches such as the improper use of space heaters, kitchen stoves and fire places, leading to the threat of fire danger and carbon monoxide poisoning.

Over the past three decades, the Governor and the Legislature have provided supplemental fuel assistance resources more than a dozen times, often in response to limited federal funding and grave weather conditions. Advocates have not promoted a state fuel assistance allocation over the past two years as conditions have not warranted it.

The fuel assistance program, administered by the state Department of Housing and Community Development, and carried out by Community Action Agencies and other community groups, is set up to allow for new applicants throughout the heating season. Households that have not accessed fuel assistance yet should do so as soon as possible. The immediate concern is for those households that have already accessed fuel assistance resources and, because of the harsh weather have or will soon, exhaust the benefit and not be able to cover heating costs for the rest of the long winter.

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program helps families and individuals living in poverty across the state afford heat and address other heating challenges. That resource over the past several years has dropped from \$200 million to \$145 million for Massachusetts

MASSCAP is joined by a diverse coalition of organizations in its support for a state fuel assistance line item including:

- Children's Health Watch at the Boston Medical Center
- AARP Massachusetts
- Massachusetts Energy Marketers Association
- National Consumer Law Center
- Mass Communities Action Network
- Massachusetts Association of Councils on Aging

Thank you very much for your consideration of this urgent request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph P. Diamond". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joseph P Diamond  
Executive Director

cc. Jay Ashe, Secretary of Housing and Economic Development  
Michael Heffernan, Secretary of the Executive Office for Administration and Finance  
Chrystal Kornegay, Undersecretary Massachusetts Department of Housing and  
Community Development