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MASSCAP Requests Additional Fuel Assistance Funds for Vulnerable Massachusetts Families

Association Requests \$25 Million in the FY 18 Supplemental Budget to Head Off Public Health, Safety Crisis

Boston, Mass. (January 9, 2018) – The Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP) is urging Governor Charlie Baker and members of the Massachusetts legislature to include \$25 million for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) in the next FY 18 Supplemental Budget. In a letter to the governor and legislators, MASSCAP says that the issue of fuel assistance has “literally become a matter of life and death for some.”

“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,” said MASSCAP’s Executive Director Joe Diamond. “Particularly at risk are children and seniors across the Commonwealth.”

At close to \$3 per gallon for heating oil, the current federally-funded fuel assistance benefit will allow oil heat households to cover the cost of 1½ tanks of oil. On average, a typical household uses 3-4 tanks of heating oil to get through cold and snowy New England winters. Most of the close to 40,000 oil heat households who have accessed the fuel assistance benefit have exhausted it as of this week and all of them 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, as the region experienced over the last few weeks, heating systems run virtually non-stop. As a result, a household could go through 100 gallons in less than a week.

“People living in poverty are particularly vulnerable when the region experiences extreme weather, and that is especially the case when we face the kind of cold we have been experiencing,” said Clare Higgins, MASSCAP President and Executive Director, Community Action of Franklin, Hampshire, and North Quabbin Regions. “The \$25 million will help to ensure that the extreme winter weather does not cause a public health and safety crisis around the Commonwealth.”

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. Those interested in learning more about fuel assistance can visit MASSCAP’s website on the LIHEAP program, heatinghelpma.org, where information on eligibility and the agency serving their community can be found.

For 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.