



December 13, 2018

Governor Charles Baker
Office of the Governor, Room 280
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
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 \$30 million for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP – otherwise known as fuel assistance) be included in the next FY 19 Supplemental Budget that we understand you will soon submit to the Legislature.

The LIHEAP program continues to be in a precarious position. Federal funding for the program has decreased over time, and in fact has twice been zeroed out in the last two Trump Administration budgets. Massachusetts is facing a further reduction of \$11 million in its federal fuel assistance allocation. This decrease in funding, combined with prolonged bitterly cold weather, and steadily rising heating oil prices, are making staying warm this winter a nightmare for tens of thousands of vulnerable households who heat with oil. Particularly at risk are children, seniors, and veterans across the Commonwealth. In what could become a matter of life and death for some, we are asking you and Massachusetts legislators to provide \$30 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 \$3 per gallon for heating oil (an increase of 30 cents per gallon over last year), the fuel assistance benefit will allow oil heat households to cover the cost of 1 and 3/4 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 48,000 oil heat households will have exhausted their fuel assistance benefit by the middle to 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 nonstop. As a result, a household could go through 100 gallons in less than a week, maybe just 4 days.

An immediate state allocation of \$30 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. We only turn to state resources when it is necessary to do so for the safety and health of our residents. For example, advocates did *not* promote a state fuel assistance allocation in FY 16 or 17 as conditions did not warrant it.

The fuel assistance program, administered by the state Department of Housing and Community Development, and carried out by Community Action Agencies and other nonprofits, 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 – as was the case last winter across the Commonwealth.

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 \$136 million for Massachusetts. This allocation will be further strained by what appears to a growing number of households applying for fuel assistance. So far this year applications for the program show an increase of over 20 percent.

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, on behalf of its low-income clients
- Mass Home Care

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

Sincerely,



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
Janelle Chan, Undersecretary Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development
The Honorable Robert DeLeo, Speaker of the House of Representatives
The Honorable Karen Spilka, Senate President
Scott Ahern, Deputy Legislative Director, Office of Governor Charlie Baker
Katelyn Sprague, Legislative Director, Office of Governor Charlie Baker
Bob Ross, General Counsel, Executive Office for Administration and Finance
Emily Jue, Legislative Director, Executive Office for Administration and Finance