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## **MASSCAP Held Press Conference on Call for Supplemental Fuel Assistance Funds to Avoid Public Health & Safety Crisis**

### ***Federal Allocation Reduced by \$11 million Households Will Run Out of Home Heating Oil by end of January***

**Boston, Mass. (January 9, 2019)** – The Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP) held a press conference this morning on the steps of the State House in order to continue to urge Governor Charlie Baker and members of the Massachusetts legislature to include \$30 million for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) in the next FY 19 Supplemental Budget. With our New England winter weather and rising fuel costs in addition to a federal LIHEAP funding cut of more than \$11 million this year, the issue of fuel assistance has “literally become a matter of life and death for some.”

“We are here today to urge the Governor to help thousands of vulnerable households stay warm this winter. Of particular concern are those 48,000 households that heat with home heating oil – households made up of seniors, and children and veterans - most of whom will have used up their benefit by the end of January,” said MASSCAP executive Director Joe Diamond. “The situation demands that we ask the Governor to include \$30 million in the upcoming supplemental budget for FY 19.”

“The current benefit will allow oil heat households to cover 1 and ¾ tanks of oil; however, the typical household uses 3-4 tanks to get through the winter,” said Birgitta Damon, MASSCAP President and Executive Director, Lynn Economic Opportunity. “Fuel Assistance is a program that provides economic support for those on a fixed income (elders and persons with disabilities) and allows those who are working to maximize their income to cover their basic needs. It is, without a doubt, a program that keeps people healthy and safe in their homes.”

As Elizabeth Berube, Deputy Director, Citizens for Citizens, pointed out, vulnerable households faced with limited ability to cover heating costs may engage in dangerous alternative heating approaches such as the improper use of space heaters and kitchen stoves and fire places leading to the threat of fire danger and carbon monoxide poisoning. Winter is not going to end on March 22 because March 23 is the first day of spring," Berube said. "Massachusetts is going to be cold in March, and it's going to be cold in April. It's just the way it is."

Senator Michael Rodrigues (1st Bristol and Plymouth), Senator Jo Comerford (Hampshire, Franklin and Worcester) and Representative Paul Donato (35<sup>th</sup> Middlesex) joined MASSCAP to emphasize the necessity of this program and the urgency of the need. "It's a critical time," said Senator Michael Rodrigues. "It's critical we do this as soon as possible, because this money isn't going to mean much in May or June."

Senator Jo Comerford understands the tough choices people have to make. She spoke about a discussion she had while on the campaign trail. While phone banking, she spoke with an elderly man who said he was struggling to afford food and heat during the winter. She said that he is already making tough choices

Michael Festa, State Director for AARP Massachusetts expressed how critical this program is for our vulnerable seniors and how critical these additional funds will be for keeping our seniors safe. According to Festa, "six out of ten seniors are economically insecure".

Many additional senators and representatives were in attendance including Representative Jack Lewis, Representative Natalie Higgins, Senator. Adam Hinds, Rep Stephen Hay, Representative Alan Silva, Representative Peter Capano, Representative Dan Cahill, Representative Mindy Domb, Representative Natalie Blais, Representative David LeBoeuf, Senator Brendan Crighton, Representative Elizabeth Malia, Representative Sean Garballey, Senator. Harriette Chandler, Senator. Bruce Tarr, Representative Tommy Vitolo, Representative Maria Robinson, Representative William Driscoll, Representative Paul Brodeur, Representative Lindsay Sabadosa, Representative Gerard Cassidy, Representative Tami Gouveia, Representative Jim Hawkins and Representative Carole Fiola as well as City Councillor Ed Flynn.

As Representative Paul Donato said, "this is a major problem and a problem that the legislature understands," said Representative Paul Donato of Medford. "It is our job to convince the gentleman in the corner office how important this is and hear our loud voices that we need in the supplemental budget the \$30 million to accommodate those who need fuel assistance." We also heard from Senator Bruce Tarr, First Essex and Middlesex, how important it is to act now. "It is about public safety".

At \$3 per gallon for heating oil, the current federally-funded fuel assistance benefit will allow oil heat households to cover the cost of 1 and 3/4 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 48,000 oil heat households who have accessed the fuel assistance benefit have exhausted it already and all of them will have exhausted it by the end of the month, leaving them in a perilous position for the rest of the winter. When temperatures are between 10 to 20 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.

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](http://heatinghelpma.org), where information on eligibility and the agency serving their community can be found.

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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