



MASSCAP
Massachusetts Association for Community Action
Creating Opportunity. Changing Lives. Ending Poverty.

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Bitter Cold, Snow and Extreme Winter Weather Make Call for Supplemental Fuel Assistance Funds More Urgent

Households Will Run Out of Home Heating Oil by end of January

Boston, MA, January 21, 2019 – The severe winter that we knew was coming is now here. With temperatures below freezing and dropping to single digits, along with this past weekend’s storm bringing up to a foot of snow and sleet and ice, we are all using a lot of heat. When temperatures are between 10 to 20 degrees, heating systems run virtually non-stop. As a result, a household could go through 100 gallons in less than a week.

We 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. The severe weather with more to come along with the cut of \$11 million in the MA federal fuel assistance allocation this year makes the need for assistance literally a matter of life and death.

“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.

Last Thursday, Senator Bruce Tarr and Senator Michael Rodrigues were joined by more than 70 House and Senate member in reaching out to Governor Charlie Baker to support the need for the additional funding request to help at risk residents with heating assistance. “We have to act now in order to protect the most vulnerable members of our community,” said Senator Michael J. Rodrigues. “This money isn’t going to mean much in May or June, so it’s critical that we do this as soon as possible.”

“Keeping warm in the winter is an essential part of life in New England, and it’s important to the health and safety of many residents who would be vulnerable without this type of assistance,” said Senate Minority Leader Bruce Tarr. “Seniors, veterans, families with children and others are counting on our Commonwealth to provide the home heating support they need, particularly in light of the federal reductions.”

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.

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. They may also be faced with tough choices including choosing between heat and food or healthcare.

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 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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