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## **MASSCAP, Community Action Agencies, MEDA Launches Annual Statewide Heating Help Awareness Campaign**

### *A Focus on Fuel Assistance and Weatherization*

**Saugus, MA – October 29, 2019** – MASSCAP, along with LEO Inc., the network of Community Action Agencies in Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Energy Directors Association (MEDA), will launch its annual statewide awareness campaign to ensure that vulnerable Massachusetts families are able to keep safe, warm and healthy this winter. Heating help programs include both fuel assistance and energy efficiency programs. The awareness campaign started today with the kickoff event, hosted by Representative Donald Wong, at Kowloon Restaurant in Saugus this morning. Speakers included Rep. Wong and Senator Bruce Tarr, Janelle Chan, the Undersecretary of the Department of Housing and Community Development as well as representatives from the utility companies, the MA Energy Directors Association and other connected agencies. The campaign will also include the placement of a number of billboards throughout the state highlighting the fact that low income families and individuals can receive home heating help. The website [heatinghelpMA.org](http://heatinghelpMA.org) (connected to the MASSCAP website) provides information for those in need of assistance.



*Fuel Assistance Awareness Billboard*

“We want to raise awareness of the energy and efficiency programs to make sure those who need assistance know how to access it. Winters in New England can be brutal and fuel assistance helps our vulnerable friends and neighbors avoid having to make excruciating decisions related to heating or food or clothes,” said Joe Diamond, MASSCAP’s executive director. “Fuel assistance helps to stabilize a household from an economic point of view, allowing people to focus on the kind of supports and training that lead to economic mobility.”

Fuel Assistance, or the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), is a federal program that helps low income households address energy costs. Home heating fuel assistance is a federal program administered by DCHD, the state Department of Housing and Community Development, in partnership with local agencies. The program is administered in Massachusetts by a

network of 22 community-based organizations, including 20 Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the City of Cambridge, and the New England Farm Workers Council. Together, up to 160,000 households each year are served and more than 24,000 with energy efficiency programs. The Heating Help billboards will be in more than 40 locations around Massachusetts, beginning in November and lasting throughout the winter months.

“It is my pleasure to host the kickoff event. Fuel Assistance is so important to my constituents,” said Representative Donald Wong. “I was happy to join with my colleagues to promote the inclusion of Fuel Assistance funding in the FY19 Massachusetts Supplemental Budget. It is critical that we do our part to protect vulnerable residents across the state.”

The LIHEAP program is crucial not only to help pay for the rising cost of heat during cold New England winters, but also to ensure public safety and health throughout the region. Fuel Assistance recipients are also eligible for the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), a federal program that helps participating households stretch their fuel assistance dollars, and other energy efficiency programs.

“Warmth is not a luxury -- not in New England. It is a public health and safety issue,” said Birgitta S. Damon, President, MASSCAP, and Chief Executive Officer, LEO Inc. “When people are cold, they go to extreme measures to change that situation, often choosing between heat, food and medicine, and using unsafe methods for heat. Community Action Agencies are integral to connecting low-income families and individuals to the support they need. It is our responsibility to share our experience with decision-makers at all levels to encourage adequate investment to safeguard our communities.”

“At LEO Inc.,” Damon continued, “we coordinated home heating fuel assistance for 6,033 individuals in 2,687 households last year. Seventy-five percent of households had an elderly household member (60+), a disabled household member, and/or a child age 5 or younger. Our weatherization and energy solutions team assisted 300+ households to repair or replace heating systems or failing appliances, repair fuel and electrical lines, and remediate lead and radon in homes.”

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 approximately 600,000 low-income people annually, more than half of them with incomes below 125% of the federal poverty level.

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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