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MASSCAP, Community Action Agencies, MEDA Launch Annual Statewide Heating Help Awareness Campaign

A Focus on Fuel Assistance and Weatherization

Boston, MA – October 23, 2020 – MASSCAP, along with Action 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 live streamed virtual kickoff event ([Click here to watch](#)). Speakers included Senator Bruce Tarr, Representative Ann-Margaret Ferrante, Gloucester Mayor Sefatia Romeo Theken, as well as representatives from National Grid, Cape Ann Oil, City of Worcester, the MA Energy Directors Association and other connected agencies. The campaign will also include a digital advertising on Google and Facebook and billboards, highlighting the fact that heating help is here for those in need. The website heatinghelpMA.org (connected to the MASSCAP website) provides information for those in need of assistance.

Joe Diamond, Executive Director, MASSCAP, opened today's program. "We wanted to make sure that we got the word out in way that was safe, but also informative." Diamond explained, "The goals that we pursue have everything to do with helping our vulnerable friends and neighbors living with low incomes to become economically stable and mobile. Fuel assistance allows us to help about 160,000 households across the Commonwealth heat their homes. We work closely with allied organizations to help us reach the people we know need it the most."

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 19 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.

"Fuel assistance is also a partnership between the federal government and the state government, Diamond noted. "Over the past 30 years, about half of the time, we have turned to the legislature and the Governor for supplemental resources to help people when the federal resource was not enough. This partnership is something that continues to be very important and we look forward to working with them to help the people that we serve."

“Keeping warm is a basic human need. In order to maintain public health, we need to make sure that people have adequate home heating...When we know there is an avoidable situation that affects public health, we need to do everything to address it,” said Senator Bruce Tarr. “That is why I have been so committed that we do everything we can through state government, also partnering with the federal government, to make sure that we have fuel assistance and that people are able to take advantage of it.”

“What I don’t want to see is someone who actually makes it to that point to pay for own rent or own their own home and then not be able to buy their prescription drugs, not be able to buy food as prescription and food prices are all increasing or not be able to heat their home effectively and efficiently,” Representative Ferrante told us. “It is not just the payment for mortgage or rent, it is whether or not you can live in a healthy fashion within your own home. Fuel assistance is so important. We just never know what is going to happen.”

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.

“A lot of times when people don’t have enough money to pay for their bills, they will forego medications, food and rent in order to pay for their utility bills, and that can be really dangerous. Oftentimes, people will use unsafe heating sources like stoves and space heaters, and we really don’t want to see people doing that” pointed out Peggy Hegarty-Steck, President and Executive Director, Action Inc. “In this time of COVID, we are expecting to have a much larger number of people who are now eligible due to the change in their income. One in three families in our region are eligible for fuel assistance. We want to make sure that people are taking advantage of the help that is out there, particularly in this time of great need.”

Eligibility guidelines can be found at www.heatinghelpma.org. It is important to note that eligibility is based on the last four weeks of gross income and that any additional stimulus funds or pandemic unemployment assistance funds do not count toward income. This program will help so many through these particularly hard times.

Gloucester Mayor Sefatia Romeo Theken urged people to apply, saying “What do you have to lose to apply? If you think you are going to be turned down, there could be other programs for you. They just don’t give you fuel, they give you fuel for your soul too.”

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About MASSCAP

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.