

Open Letter in Support of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program

December 2011

Dear Governor Cuomo, Congressional Delegation:

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) opens in New York this week and it opens to reduced benefit levels that will hurt low-income New Yorkers in every county. The Democratic Rural Caucus (DRC) is writing to urge you to oppose federal funding cuts for this important program and restoration of funding levels to the FY 2011 levels.

New York's LIHEAP Program is the largest in the country and provides critical heating assistance in every community, rural and urban. It serves the most vulnerable portion of our population. Many of those receiving heating bill payment assistance through LIHEAP are elderly, disabled or children under the age of six. In many rural communities, LIHEAP provides critical heating assistance that helps those with heating systems fueled by bulk fuels (oil, kerosene, propane).

LIHEAP is a heat or eat program. For LIHEAP households, this often means the difference between buying medicine or food or heating their home. LIHEAP households and the tradeoffs that they make to heat are well documented:

- 40 percent have someone age 60 or older
- 72 percent have a family member with a serious medical condition
- 26 percent use medical equipment that requires electricity
- 37 percent went without medical or dental care
- 34 percent did not fill a prescription or took less than their full dose of prescribed medication
- 19 percent became sick because the home was too cold
- 85 percent of people with a medical condition are seniors

New York's Congressional delegation (both houses, both parties) has long supported this important program. We are writing to ask you to support it again as the discussion about 2012 funding levels continues. LIHEAP was funded nationally at \$4.7 billion in FY 2011. When the Dept. of Health and Human Services released its 2012 funding at the end of October, they released \$1.7 billion nationally. This is resulting in a smaller program with lower benefits which will be an especially serious issue for rural households who rely on bulk fuels that are increasing by 20-30% this year.

Please continue your support for this critical program and encourage the President and both houses of Congress to seek additional funding for this critical resource.

Sincerely,
Irene Stein, Chairwoman
The DRC membership