

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 4, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-220, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer:

As you begin work on the next package of initiatives to help Americans cope with the consequences of the public health crisis caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic, we'd like to bring your attention to the dire and urgent need for energy assistance. We respectfully request that you provide at least \$4.3 billion in supplemental funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to assist households suffering from the economic effects of COVID-19. Now more than ever, it is critical to provide a safety net for our most vulnerable American families. In addition, we are requesting that the state administrative cap be raised to 15 percent to allow states to ramp up their application process and make modifications to the systems to increase outreach to the newly unemployed.

We appreciate the \$900 million included in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act for LIHEAP. The National Energy Assistance Directors' Association (NEADA) estimates that this amount will help approximately 1.5 million households currently receiving LIHEAP and 1.5 million recently unemployed. However, in a typical year, LIHEAP serves only one out of six eligible households. With more than 30 million Americans filing for unemployment in the last six weeks, it is clear this funding will only scratch the surface of what families will need to stay afloat. The resulting increase in the low income population has increased the number of eligible households by 8.5 million from 35.2 million to 43.8 million.

While there are current moratoria in effect preventing disconnect notices for energy utilities, our state directors and utility programs are reporting skyrocketing requests for assistance. For example, one utility reported that non-payment of utility bills has increased from approximately 1% to 24% in the past month. In some states, utility assistance is the number two request behind rent assistance and one program reported 200-300 walk-ins and phone calls daily, more than double the typical requests for utility assistance at this time of year. When shutoff moratoria are lifted, the need for utility assistance will reflect the need documented in unemployment applications.

According to NEADA, state directors would use the additional \$4.3 billion in funds to serve approximately 11 million households. 50 percent of the funding would help newly laid off workers, 25 percent would help low-income families who were already struggling and for whom the pandemic will only make things worse, and the remaining 25 percent will go towards the purchase of air conditioning units for the elderly and those with pre-existing health conditions who are required to shelter-in-place. States have also reported that they are ready to move funds quickly. Despite the challenges of switching from in-person applications to telephone or mail, states are making the necessary changes to keep their programs open and continue providing service to families in need.

NEADA's estimate of need assumes an average grant of \$325 to cover home energy costs for four months, plus \$300 to provide window or room air conditioners for elderly and medically vulnerable households to ensure their houses stay a safe temperature while they are sheltering in place.

Thank you for your attention to and consideration of our request. While the initial \$900 million will bridge the gap, giving states the ability to keep programs running, staff employed, and customers served, it is insufficient to meet the rapidly growing need for assistance. We look forward to working with you to develop a more comprehensive solution that includes increased funding for LIHEAP.

Sincerely,



Peter Welch
United States Representative



Jack Reed
United States Senator

/s/ Peter T. King

United States Representative

/s/ Debbie Stabenow

United States Senator

/s/ James P. McGovern

United States Representative

/s/ Jeanne Shaheen

United States Senator

/s/ Joseph P. Kennedy, III
United States Representative

/s/ Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

/s/ Chellie Pingree
United States Representative

/s/ Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

/s/ Jared Golden
United States Representative

/s/ Doug Jones
United States Senator

/s/ Ann McLane Kuster
United States Representative

/s/ Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Pappas
United States Representative

/s/ Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

/s/ Don Young
United States Representative