



NATIONAL FUEL FUNDS NETWORK

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The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius,

I am writing on behalf of the more than 300 members of the National Fuel Funds Network to ask that you release any remaining Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program contingency funds available for this fiscal year.

This has been a very difficult winter for millions of Americans trying to keep their homes warm and livable. High home energy costs and high unemployment have forced many more people to seek help through LIHEAP.

Across the nation, LIHEAP offices have been seeing record numbers of applicants and some programs are running low on funds. In my home state of Iowa, the winter weather has been brutal. As executive director of the Operation New View Community Action Agency in Dubuque, I have seen a five percent increase in LIHEAP applications this year and over 60 percent of these applicants are well below 100 percent of the poverty level.

As winter turns to spring, the need for assistance with energy bills still remains as households, who built up arrearages during the winter months, now face disconnection as utility cut-off moratoria expire. The Iowa Utilities Board reported that at the end of February the number of LIHEAP recipients with past due accounts is at an all time record high for our state, over 41,000 households. The total amount owed on past due utility accounts has reached nearly \$39 million, the second highest total ever reported for Iowa.

This has become a crisis situation compounded by the fact that the utility shutoff moratorium will end on April 1st with thousands of households facing a disconnection of their natural gas and electric.

These are indeed hard times for many people and the additional LIHEAP emergency funds could provide some welcomed relief for those trying to make ends meet.

Many of the members of the National Fuel Funds Network operate fuel funds, which generally provide assistance to households that either don't qualify for LIHEAP or have exhausted their LIHEAP grants. Despite administering more than \$150 million in charitably raised assistance funds annually, our members' organizations cannot meet the need left unfilled by LIHEAP.

Again, I ask that you release all available LIHEAP contingency funds as soon as possible. Those funds can make a difference to millions of people in need.

Thank you,
/S/
Tom Stovall
Chairman of the Board of Directors
National Fuel Funds Network