

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2102

November 1, 2011

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader Reid,

Today marks the opening date of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) program for the winter season. I write to you with concern based on the administration's recent announcement that they will be disbursing LIHEAP funds based on an annual allocation of \$2 billion despite the fact that the Senate budgeted \$3.6 billion and the House \$3.4 billion for Fiscal Year 2012. I am asking you to consider including language in any upcoming Fiscal Year 2012 Continuing Resolution that would require the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to provide LIHEAP funding to the states based on \$5.1 billion from Fiscal Year 2011, or at the very least based on the average \$3.5 billion level in the bills before Congress.

Just last week an early Nor'easter storm slammed into Massachusetts and the rest of New England causing over 670,000 power outages in Massachusetts and dumping up to 32 inches of snow in some areas. The anticipated brutal winter has begun early and we need to ensure that these communities are provided heating. LIHEAP providers are already seeing record high applications due to the 8 percent increase in home heating oil prices over last year and our continuing economic difficulties. I have heard directly from Mayors across the state tell me heartbreaking stories of families desperate to get by choosing between medication and meals for their kids and heating their homes.

We must provide some stability and assurance to needy families as well as LIHEAP providers. By distributing the money to the states in dribs and drabs it puts oil deliveries at risk because companies don't know if they will get paid. Families won't know if they can depend on this assistance and benefit levels cannot be established. Possibly the most scary of all is if LIHEAP providers don't know their funding levels it is possible that families who have had their gas and/or electric shut off will be unable to get it turned back on before the November 15 winter "moratorium" on shut offs. If utilities are not turned on by that date, families will go into the winter without heat or electricity.

Lack of faith in the federal appropriations process has forced many to seek alternatives. In Massachusetts State Senator Katherine Clark has put forward an amendment that would provide state funding to temporarily fill in any gap in federal allocation of LIHEAP funding so that families won't be left out in the cold. I support Senator Clark's efforts but this shouldn't be necessary.

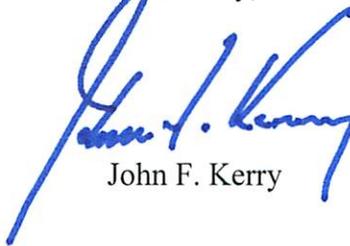
The Honorable Harry Reid
November 1, 2011
Page 2

As you know, LIHEAP continues to be cut despite the growing need. The House and Senate numbers are already far too low - constituting over a 30 percent cut from last year's level. Last winter's largest benefit to a family in Massachusetts was \$1,050. Due to this year's record high oil prices that would provide the neediest family in the Commonwealth a single tank of home heating oil which all of us know will not last the entire winter. In fact most of my constituents need at least 4 tanks to make it through.

I have already written to the President asking that he provide \$5.1 billion in his Fiscal Year 2013 budget for LIHEAP. I hope to work with you and the administration to continue to push for more funding for this vital program that is so needed by the country's senior citizens, families and children. However, in the interim HHS should not hold the LIHEAP program hostage to an arbitrary level of \$2 billion. Inclusion of language that sets a level of distribution based on \$5.1 billion or at least \$3.5 billion in LIHEAP funding would mean more families would be able to plan for the oncoming winter.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John F. Kerry", is written over the typed name. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "K".

John F. Kerry