



**August 31, 2016 Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly
Appropriations, Human Services, and Energy & Technology Committees**

**LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (LIHEAP)
BLOCK GRANT ALLOCATION PLAN FFY 2016/2017**

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members of the Appropriations, Human Services, and Energy & Technology Committees:

Thank you for holding this hearing on the proposed Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) Block Grant Allocation Plan for FFY 2016/2017. My name is Michelle James. I am the Executive Director of the Community Action Agency of Western Connecticut, Inc. (CAAWC) and the 2nd Vice Chair of the Connecticut Association for Community Action, Inc. (CAFCA). As you know, CAFCA is the state association for Connecticut's Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the state and federal designated anti-poverty agencies serving every one of Connecticut's 169 cities and towns.

Every year, the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP) continues to assist thousands of families across the state pay their heating bills and avoid unnecessary energy crises. On behalf of Connecticut's Community Action Network, I would like to thank you and Governor Malloy for continuing to strongly advocate for this critical program, and thank Commissioner Bremby for his ongoing support and that of his staff at the Department of Social Services.

Although summer is just coming to a close, Connecticut's Community Action Agencies are already preparing for the influx of energy assistance applicants they know will come through their doors in the months ahead. In 2015/2016, our network processed over 104,000 CEAP applications and provided over 90,000 eligible households with energy assistance (FY 2015/2016 data is available on page 3). Our agencies understand how home energy costs can weigh on a family's budget in the winter—especially those in deep poverty—as they struggle to pay their heating bills.

An affordable energy bill is considered to be 6% of a family's income; however, the energy bills of Connecticut's poorest households (those below 50% of the Federal Poverty Level) take up between 45-53%¹. In addition, according to the Home Energy Affordability Gap: Connecticut (2015) Report, over 310,000 households in the state owe about \$1,500 more in annual energy bills than they can afford to pay. As a result, these families often face the devastating burden of having to choose between heating their homes and other basic needs

¹ Dan Boyce and Jordan Wirfs-Brock, "High Utility Costs Force Hard Decisions for the Poor", *Inside Energy*, May 8, 2016, Available from: <http://insideenergy.org/2016/05/08/high-utility-costs-force-hard-decisions-for-the-poor/>

such as food, childcare, healthcare, and housing bills—a trend we continue to see year after year in both urban and suburban areas².

This is where LIHEAP comes in, serving Connecticut's most at-risk and Energy Insecure (EI) households. EI is measured by the proportion of household energy expenditures relative to household income, meaning lower-income families are more likely to experience it. In many cases, this situation threatens to lessen a family's ability to keep up with other costs associated with basic needs—forcing them to adjust their household budget, especially during the winter months.³ In a National Energy Assistance Director's Association (NEADA) survey of households across the country receiving LIHEAP and making less than \$30,000 per year, 23% kept their home at a temperature that was unsafe or unhealthy; 31% did not make their full rent or mortgage payment; 34% did not fill a prescription or took less than a full dose; and, 33% used their kitchen stove or oven to provide heat.⁴ LIHEAP helps lessen these tradeoffs that threaten the health and safety of limited income families throughout the winter, especially those with children, the elderly, and the disabled.

LIHEAP is a vital safety net program, giving underserved families access to affordable home energy solutions and the opportunity to address and offset the cost of other necessary, basic, everyday needs. As one program recipient from New Haven said, "It definitely helps keep us out of the cold...it's a life saver." These essential funds help to ensure families don't have to choose between staying warm and putting food on the table, taking their kids to daycare, or paying their health insurance—resulting in a positive impact on their overall health and wellness. In our Community Action Agencies, LIHEAP also opens the door to other programs and services families may not have known they were eligible for such as weatherization, child care, or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. This holistic approach provides families with the extra short and long-term support they need to survive and thrive.

Despite the unusually mild 2015-2016 winter season, there is a clear, demonstrated need for LIHEAP here in Connecticut. We know all too well what a typical New England winter looks like, and our agencies are already accepting applications for the upcoming year. Therefore, we would like to commend Commissioner Bremby and DSS for not only basing its CEAP allocation on level funding from FFY 2016, but also for the additional FFY 16 carryover funds and available LIHEAP vendor refunds. In addition to the state's support of the program, we remain grateful that Connecticut has decided to continue its policy of allocating additional assistance to low-income families so that they can remain eligible for food assistance. Lastly, we applaud the DSS decision to include \$1M for conservation/weatherization measures around health and safety. In closing, our network is pleased to fully support the Department's CEAP 2016/2017 Allocation Plan for the LIHEAP Block Grant.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I am happy to take any questions you may have.

² Operation Fuel, "Home Energy Affordability In Connecticut: The Affordability Gap (2015)," December 2015, available from: <http://www.operationfuel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2015-ConnecticutHEAG.pdf>

³ National Center for Children in Poverty, "Energy Insecurity Among Families with Children" (January 2014). Available from: http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_1086.pdf

⁴ National Energy Assistance Director's Association (NEADA), "2011 National Energy Assistance Survey Summary Report" (October 2011). Available from: <http://neada.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/final-neada-2011-summary-eport.pdf>

Chart 1: CEAP Total Caseload Comparison

Agency	<u>2015/2016</u> <u>(6/23/2016)</u>	<u>2014/2015</u> <u>(6/23/2015)</u>
ABCD (Bridgeport)	10,033	10,850
ABCD (Norwalk/Stamford)	5,307	5,312
BCO (Bristol)	3,163	3,440
CAAWC (Danbury)	5,001	5,167
CRT (Hartford/Middletown)	24,506	28,301
TEAM (Derby)	3,794	4,269
HRA (New Britain)	4,114	4,525
CAANH (New Haven)	11,278	11,536
TVCCA (Norwich)	8,792	9,456
NOI (Waterbury/Meriden)	20,981	22,899
ACCESS (Willimantic)	7,215	7,809
Statewide Totals:	104,184	113,564

Data from DSS

Chart 2: CEAP Eligible Caseload Comparison

Agency	<u>2015/2016</u> <u>(6/23/2016)</u>	<u>2014/2015</u> <u>(6/23/2015)</u>
ABCD (Bridgeport)	8,719	9,437
ABCD (Norwalk/Stamford)	4,723	4,819
BCO (Bristol)	2,501	2,837
CAAWC (Danbury)	4,399	4,451
CRT (Hartford/Middletown)	21,124	24,375
TEAM (Derby)	3,104	3,394
HRA (New Britain)	3,048	3,400
CAANH (New Haven)	9,397	9,827
TVCCA (Norwich)	7,671	8,366
NO (Waterbury/Meriden)	19,217	20,885
ACCESS (Willimantic)	6,758	7,297
Statewide Totals:	90,661	99,088

Data from DSS