



February 4, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Blunt, Chairwoman DeLauro, and Ranking Member Cole:

On behalf of an unprecedented number of low-income families nationwide struggling to pay their energy bills during the economic upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the American Gas Association, American Public Gas Association, American Public Power Association, Edison Electric Institute, National Energy & Fuels Institute, National Propane Gas Association, and National Rural Electric Cooperative Association urge Congress to provide an additional \$10 billion in emergency Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funds in upcoming COVID relief legislation. Now more than ever, it is critical to provide a safety net for our most vulnerable American families.

LIHEAP is the bedrock of America's energy safety net, providing heating and cooling assistance to our most vulnerable, including the elderly, those with disabilities, and families with young children. Unfortunately, even in healthier economic circumstances, LIHEAP need has proven to be far greater than the federal resources provided to serve vulnerable families. For example, in fiscal year (FY) 2019, despite low unemployment, a strong economy, and stable utility prices, only one of every six LIHEAP eligible households were able to be served.

Now the situation is substantially more dire. Recent economic reports show more than 10.7 million Americans are unemployed. In addition, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse survey, an estimated 10.5 million adults living in rental housing were not caught up on rent and an estimated 8.7 million adults are in a household that is not caught up on its mortgage payment. Meanwhile, millions of impoverished and working poor families are falling further behind on their gas and electric utility bills. Responding to the rising need for home energy assistance during the early stages of the pandemic, last year Congress wisely appropriated an additional \$900 million above the FY 2020 LIHEAP funding level in the CARES Act to address the growing crisis. Months later, the pandemic has worsened, and CARES Act funding has only covered a small fraction of low-income households needing support.

Across the country, gas and electric utilities and deliverable heating fuel providers have developed billing programs to protect struggling American families during this pandemic. In many cases, utilities have voluntarily instituted moratoriums to prevent disconnections. In other circumstances, states have instituted broad billing moratoriums, in many cases alongside preexisting weather or seasonal billing moratoriums. Importantly, because energy service is vital to protecting people, we are committed to not disconnect

anyone who is on a payment plan and stays current. However, while moratoriums may help customers manage their short-term financial condition, they are not a policy solution. All they do is push utility debt into the future, leaving low-income customers a higher, perhaps unmanageable, bill. In contrast, the LIHEAP program is a proven, efficient, appropriations-funded program that helps low-income households pay their energy bills.

The National Energy Assistance Directors Association estimates that utilities have accumulated approximately \$30 billion in overdue bills since the beginning of the pandemic. Providing an additional \$10 billion in supplemental LIHEAP funding in an upcoming COVID relief bill will only put a dent in America's energy poverty problem. However, with additional funding, the program can expand utility bill payment assistance to millions more Americans experiencing unemployment and other economic hardship in the coming months due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

American Gas Association
American Public Gas Association
American Public Power Association
Edison Electric Institute
National Energy & Fuels Institute
National Propane Gas Association
National Rural Electric Cooperative Association

cc: Members, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies