

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 6, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Vice Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Vice Chairwoman Mikulski:

We write in strong support of the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) and to urge you to increase funding for both of these important programs in the final appropriations bill for fiscal year (FY) 2016.

Given the fiscal constraints, we appreciate the \$3.390 billion for LIHEAP that was included in the Senate committee-approved Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill, which is the same amount that was provided in FY 2015. We are increasingly concerned, however, that the number of households eligible for LIHEAP assistance continues to exceed available LIHEAP funding. LIHEAP provides a vital safety net for our nation's low-income households, disabled individuals, and senior citizens living on fixed incomes. According to the National Energy Assistance Directors' Association, the current funding level is able to serve just 20 percent of the eligible population, and those who receive LIHEAP assistance have seen their average grant reduced by nearly \$100 since 2010. The average LIHEAP grant now covers just a fraction of average home energy costs, leaving many low-income families and seniors struggling to pay for the basic necessity of home energy and having fewer resources available to meet other essential needs. The National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners has noted that more than twenty percent – one in five – of American households were behind on their energy bill coming into this winter.

We also appreciate the \$197 million provided for the WAP in the Senate committee-approved Energy and Water Development Appropriations bill, which is \$7 million more than the level provided in FY 2015. The WAP has helped low-income families, seniors, and individuals with disabilities make lasting and cost-effective energy efficiency improvements to their homes and reduce the burden of high energy prices for more than three decades. To date, more than 7.3 million homes have been weatherized. This has directly resulted in providing as much as \$450 in savings on a household's annual energy bill. WAP also supports thousands of high quality jobs. The National Association of State Community Services Programs has estimated that there are about 10,000 highly skilled jobs in the weatherization network, with countless more supported in related businesses including materials suppliers, vendors, and manufacturers.

No family in our nation should be forced to choose between paying an energy bill and putting food on the table. No senior citizen should have to decide between buying life-saving prescriptions and paying utility bills. For individuals and households that may have to face these difficult choices, LIHEAP makes a real difference in their ability to cope with adverse

circumstances. Similarly, WAP is helping to reduce energy consumption and permanently reduce the burden of home energy prices on low-income families.

As you consider a final appropriations bill for FY 2016, we urge you to please consider increasing funding for LIHEAP and WAP. Thank you for your long-time support of both programs and your consideration of this important request. We look forward to continuing to work with you to support these vital programs.

Sincerely,

Jack Reed

Susan M. Collins

Edward J. Markey

Maria Cantwell

Brian Schatz

Dan Claitor

Armen Gohmert

Tommy Ladd

Lee Hefner

Richard Blumenthal

Debbie Starnow

Joe Donnelly

Rabbi Merendy

Whitmore

Jeanne Shaker

Chuck Sch

Elizabeth Han

Mazie H Ariano

Amy Klobuchar

Jeffrey A. Merkley

Bill Murray

August King

Ben Sanders

Patrick Leahy

Bob Casey, Jr.

Kirsten Gillibrand

Mary F. Bent Ran Wyden

Jon Tuttle Barbara Boxer

Al Franken Paul Menchaca

Chris Coons Dick Durbin