



September 29, 2003

The Honorable Ted Stevens
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As the conference committee begins consideration of the FY 2004 Labor, Health and Human Services and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, the Coalition of Northeastern Governors (CONEG) urges you to provide at least \$2 billion for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). The Governors appreciate Congress' consistent support for the LIHEAP program, and recognize the difficult budgetary decisions facing the Appropriations Committee this year.

Low income citizens across the country are disproportionately affected by high home energy bills. LIHEAP is a valuable tool in making home energy affordable for over five million of the nation's very low-income households – the elderly and disabled on fixed incomes and families with young children. Many low-income residents are forced to make dangerous choices between paying utility bills or purchasing food or vital medications.

In the Northeast in particular, this past winter's sharp increases in the price of home heating fuels, increased joblessness and a lagging economy have created a heightened demand on the states' already-stretched LIHEAP programs. In recent years, states across the country have seen significant increases in their regular caseloads as well as in requests for emergency assistance from those households in imminent danger of a utility or fuel service cut-off. The projected need far outweighs the available funding, with only a fraction of eligible households nationwide – about 15 percent – being served at recent LIHEAP funding levels.

An increase in the regular LIHEAP appropriation to at least \$2 billion for FY 2004 will enable states across the nation to reach more of those vulnerable citizens in need of assistance and more fully implement cost-effective measures to meet their continuing energy needs. Today, most winter heating programs exhausted their program resources at the end of the heating season. As a result, they have limited ability to assist families who, in arrears on heating bills, face the prospect of having their home heating source cut off.

Your support for FY 2004 LIHEAP appropriations of at least \$2 billion is urgently needed to enable our states to help mitigate the potential life-threatening emergencies and economic hardship that confront the nation's most vulnerable citizens.

The Governors thank you for your past support of LIHEAP and stand ready to provide you with any additional information on the importance of this program to the Northeast and the nation.

Sincerely,

/o.s./
Mitt Romney
Chair

/o.s./
John Baldacci
Vice Chair

Identical letters were sent to House & Senate Conferees