

January 8, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As states across the nation grapple with frigid winter temperatures, the Coalition of Northeastern Governors (CONEG) urges you to release immediately the \$590.3 million Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) contingency funds for FY2010. In the current economic crisis, these additional contingency funds – provided in the recent Consolidated Appropriations Act – are needed now to help households struggling to pay increasing or past-due energy bills.

Last year, the number of households receiving heating assistance reached record levels for the second year in a row. The continuing fragile state of the economy exerts additional pressure on the low-income and recently unemployed. According to the National Energy Assistance Directors' Association (NEADA), 8.3 million households received assistance in 2009, compared to 6.1 million in 2008. Eleven states have reported increases of more than 50 percent. Based on early applications for 2010, the number of households requesting assistance this year is expected to increase by 20 percent to 10 million households nationwide. Many of these applicants have never requested help before but are facing extraordinary economic hardship due to increased unemployment and layoffs. For many of these households, the basic need of home energy has become simply unaffordable.

Unlike much of the nation, many low-income households in the Northeast will continue to confront significant and higher home energy costs this winter. The Energy Information Administration (EIA) forecasts that the national average home energy bill for household heating with natural gas, electricity and propane is expected to decline from last year. However, many households in the Northeast rely upon home heating oil; and they can expect to pay approximately \$2,000 this winter to heat their homes. That is more than double the average energy bill for households heating with electricity, and more than two and one-half times the projected home heating bill for those using natural gas.

The CONEG Governors appreciate the increased level of federal LIHEAP funding provided in FY2009 and FY2010. The prompt release of FY2010 LIHEAP contingency funds will provide states with additional resources to help address the rapidly increasing demand for the program as severe economic and weather conditions converge this winter. In addition, as the economy continues a slow recovery, we believe that the LIHEAP program must be fully funded in FY2011 at the authorized level of \$5.1 billion for the regular block grant program plus additional contingency funds for unforeseen emergencies.

Sincerely,

*/o.s./*  
David A. Paterson  
Governor of New York  
CONEG Chair

*/o.s./*  
Donald L. Carcieri  
Governor of Rhode Island  
CONEG Vice-Chair

*/o.s./*  
John Lynch  
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CONEG Lead Governor –  
LIHEAP

*/o.s./*  
M. Jodi Rell  
Governor of Connecticut

*/o.s./*  
John Baldacci  
Governor of Maine

*/o.s./*  
Jon S. Corzine  
Governor of New Jersey

*/o.s./*  
James H. Douglas  
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Deval L. Patrick  
Governor of Massachusetts