

NEADA

National Energy Assistance Directors' Association

March 30, 2018

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

On behalf of the National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA), representing the state directors of the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), I am writing to urge you to release as soon as possible remaining funds available from the FY 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act.

We request that the remaining \$589 million of the full appropriation of \$3.6 billion be released no later than May 1, 2018. The remaining amount includes the original ten percent held back by the administration earlier in the year and the funding increase passed by Congress last week. A release date of May 1 gives states only 153 days to deploy these critical funds before the end of the federal fiscal year on September 30, 2018. NEADA is concerned that any delay in the release of appropriated funds will make it difficult for states to cover the needs of poor families facing shut-off of vital utility services as a result of the expiration of winter shut-off moratoriums, or to meet staffing and planning requirements to start up summer cooling programs in warm weather states.

The release would provide well overdue support for programs that have already been approved by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. These funds would be used immediately to help some of the nation's most vulnerable households maintain access to electric and gas service, to cover outstanding bills relating to delivered fuels emergencies and to allow states to begin planning their summer cooling programs.

The average cost of home heating has remained unaffordable for millions of low-income households this winter across the country with an average annual price of \$861, representing an increase of 9.9 percent or about \$77 over the comparable cost of home heating last year. According to the US Energy Information Administration, the average home heating cost this winter for those using propane was \$1,676 heating oil \$1,506, electricity \$965 and natural gas \$634. LIHEAP assistance is only sufficient to reach about one of five eligible households and 70 percent of recipient households have at least one vulnerable and at-risk member who is elderly, disabled or have a child under the age of six.

LIHEAP's impact in many cases goes beyond providing bill payment assistance by playing a crucial role in maintaining family stability. It enables elderly citizens to live independently and ensures that young children have safe, warm homes to live in. Although the circumstances that lead each client to seek LIHEAP assistance vary, LIHEAP enables people to cope with difficult circumstances with dignity.

I appreciate your consideration of NEADA's request to release program funds. Our states are ready to deploy these funds to help some of the nation's poorest families pay their home energy bills.

Sincerely,



JOHN HARVANKO
Chair