

NEADA

NATIONAL ENERGY ASSISTANCE DIRECTORS' ASSOCIATION

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

September 30, 2019

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 program funds for FY 2020 at 90 percent of the FY 2019 program level, the same percentage that was released in FY 2018 to the states prior to the enactment of a full-year appropriation. This approach is appropriate since the House has approved \$3.84 billion for LIHEAP in FY 2020 and the Senate Appropriation Committee chairman's mark was set at \$3.39 billion, indicating that both houses intend to provide FY 2020 funding for LIHEAP at FY 2019 levels or higher.


LIHEAP is a seasonal program. Providing 90 percent of the funds at the beginning of the fiscal year is vital to the program's effectiveness. Therefore, NEADA is requesting that program funds be released no later than October 15, 2019. This will allow states to provide funds to local administering agencies to hire staff to start and plan winter heating programs and be ready to help some of the nation's most vulnerable households to maintain access to electric and gas service.

The average cost of home heating has remained unaffordable for millions of low-income households with an average annual price of \$916 last winter. According to the US Energy Information Administration, the average home heating cost last winter for those using propane was \$1,604, heating oil \$1,520, electricity \$1,174 and natural gas \$581. Funding for 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 are different, LIHEAP links these stories by enabling people to cope with difficult circumstances with dignity.

I appreciate your consideration of NEADA's request to release 90 percent of program funds no later than October 15, 2019. Our states are ready to deploy these funds to help some of the nation's poorest families pay their home energy bills.

Sincerely,



Barb Klug
Chair, NEADA