

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 4, 2019

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
125 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

We write in support of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and to urge the adoption of the highest possible funding level in the FY 2020 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. A bipartisan group of 44 Senators urged you to support funding for this program earlier this year and we request that you continue to prioritize funding for this vital program in FY 2020 to help ensure that it meets the needs of eligible low-income households and seniors.

LIHEAP is the main federal program that helps low-income households and seniors with their energy bills, providing vital assistance during both the cold winter and hot summer months. LIHEAP assistance is an indispensable lifeline, helping to ensure that recipients do not have to choose between paying their energy bills and affording other necessities like food and medicine. Access to affordable home energy is a matter of health and safety for many low-income households, children, and seniors.

We are very concerned that the number of households eligible for LIHEAP assistance continues to exceed available funding. This is at a time when the average cost of home heating and cooling remains unaffordable for many households nationwide. According to the National Energy Assistance Directors' Association, the current funding level is able to serve just one out of six eligible households, and those who receive LIHEAP assistance have seen their average grant reduced by about \$76 since 2010, from \$568 in FY 2010 to \$520 in FY 2019. As a result, the purchasing power of the average grant for winter heating declined from about 66 percent in FY 2010 to 56 percent in FY 2018, 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.

As you finalize the FY 2020 funding bill, we thank you again for your past support of the program and ask that you continue to take into account the great need for LIHEAP and the impact that cuts to the program could have on our most vulnerable citizens. Prioritizing LIHEAP in FY 2020 would ensure that eligible, low-income households and seniors receive much needed heating and cooling assistance.

Thank you for your attention to and consideration of our request. We look forward to continuing to work with you to support this important program and to help provide access to affordable home energy for the most vulnerable households in our states.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Jack Reed in blue ink.

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Susan M. Collins in blue ink.

Susan M. Collins
United States Senator