



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

NEWS RELEASE

Consumer Counsel Elin Swanson Katz

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Contact: Elin Swanson Katz

Elin.Katz@ct.gov

(860) 827-2910

CONSUMER COUNSEL ELIN SWANSON KATZ & 35 ATTORNEYS GENERAL & STATE CONSUMER ADVOCATES OPPOSE ELIMINATION OF CRITICAL LOW- INCOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Advocates Urge Congress to Expand Funding for Millions of Vulnerable Residents

NEW BRITAIN, Conn. (August 1, 2017) On July 31, 2017, Consumer Counsel Elin Swanson Katz joined with 35 attorneys general and state consumer advocate agencies (collectively, “Advocates”) to urge members of Congress to preserve and expand Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) funding in the 2018 federal budget.

“For many low-income consumers in our state, LIHEAP and WAP are critical sources of funds to pay for heat in the winter and cooling in the summer,” Consumer Counsel Katz stated. “We must demand that the federal government fund these programs that support our most vulnerable citizens, reduce homelessness, and provide some peace of mind to those who worry that they won’t be able to pay for the most basic of services – heat and cooling. While it is dispiriting that we have to fight proposed cuts to these programs almost every year, I hope this strong coalition will send a message that we will do what it takes to preserve these federally-funded programs and these critical investments in our communities.”

In a [letter](#) submitted to Congress today, the Advocates conveyed the importance of LIHEAP and WAP to their states and expressed opposition to the proposed elimination or reduction of their funding within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service’s Office of Community Services budget.

“Since 1981, LIHEAP has helped millions of vulnerable residents retain essential utility service, thereby protecting public health and safety, reducing homelessness and ensuring the stability of utility revenues. In Fiscal Year (“FY”) 2017 alone, it is expected that about 6.1 million households nationwide will receive heating and cooling assistance through LIHEAP. The Program operates in every state and the District of Columbia, as well as on most tribal

reservations and U.S. territories,” the Advocates stated in their letter.

The Advocates emphasized the role both LIHEAP and WAP play in aiding low-income residents in paying for their home energy costs. Annual distributions of LIHEAP funds specifically prioritize seniors and families with small children. Seventy percent of recipient households have at least one member who is elderly or disabled, or have a child under the age of six. The Advocates argue that without this vital assistance, many of these families would be faced with the impossible choice of opting between heating and cooling their homes, and paying for other necessities, such as food and medications.

Likewise, the Weatherization Assistance Program has served 7 million households over 40 years. The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that WAP has helped low-income households reduce their total energy expenditures by 23 percent per year, allowing participating households to allocate scarce resources for other necessities.

The Advocates note that anticipated funding for FY 2017 does not come close to meeting the extraordinary need for either of these funds. According to the National Energy Assistance Directors’ Association, only 19 percent of eligible households are expected to be served. Since 2010, congressional funding for LIHEAP has fallen by more than a third. This decrease in funding has resulted in more than one million fewer eligible households receiving critical energy assistance. The Advocates urge Congress to restore and increase LIHEAP funding, so that fewer families are “left out in the cold.”

“LIHEAP and WAP funds have provided a critical lifeline to customers who struggle each month to pay for life’s necessities by assisting them to remain connected to essential utility services. We strongly urge you to oppose any measure that would reduce or eliminate funding for these critical programs, and instead increase these essential and cost-effective services,” the letter concluded.

Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan led the coalition of Advocates in filing today’s letter from the following states: AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, FL, HI, IA, KS, KY, MA, ME, MD, MN, MS, MT, NH, NJ, NM, NY, OR, PA, RI, UT, VT, WA, WV, WY.

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