

As winter comes to Vermont, Rep. Peter Welch is leading the charge in the U.S. House to fully fund the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

In a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Minority Leader John Boehner and leaders of the House Appropriations Committee, Welch and more than 40 colleagues are calling for LIHEAP to receive at least \$5.1 billion in funding this year – the same amount the program received last year.

Some states have already been forced to reduce LIHEAP allocations by as much as fifty percent this year because Congress has not yet passed key spending bills.

"This program is a critical safety net for countless low-income families and seniors in Vermont. There is simply no excuse for failing to help Vermonters get through a cold, difficult winter during a time of such economic uncertainty," Welch said.

According to the National Energy Assistance Directors' Association, failing to fully fund LIHEAP would cause roughly two million households to be denied benefits. At the same time, the Department of Energy estimates that average heating oil expenses will rise 12.6 percent nationwide and 14.5 percent in the Northeast this year.

Welch and his colleagues wrote, "Funding LIHEAP for the remainder of FY2011 at least at the FY2010 level of \$5.1 billion is critical to ensure that low-income families, the disabled, and senior citizens do not have to face a choice between paying their home energy bills or affording other basic necessities such as prescription drugs, housing, and food this winter."

Sen. Patrick Leahy and Sen. Bernie Sanders this week signed a similar letter in the Senate calling for full funding of the LIHEAP program.

The full text of the House letter is copied below:

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Boehner, Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Lewis:

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) provides a vital safety net for our nation's low-income households. As you know, the current Continuing Resolution expires on December 3, 2010. As you work to develop an omnibus appropriations bill or further Continuing Resolution for FY2011, we urge you to fund LIHEAP through September 30, 2011 at least at the FY2010 levels of \$5.1 billion.

Because of the structure of LIHEAP, states are already being forced to make reductions in LIHEAP benefits as a result of the discrepancies between the funding levels set forth by the House and Senate. For instance in Massachusetts, average benefits are projected to be reduced by nearly 50 percent. Funding LIHEAP through the end of the fiscal year at the FY2010 level of \$5.1 billion is critical to restoring home energy assistance and maintaining economic stability for working low-income families, senior citizens, and disabled individuals. The number of households seeking LIHEAP assistance is projected to again reach record levels this year. However, the National Energy Assistance Directors' Association projects that funding LIHEAP at the FY2011 levels reported by the Senate would lead to roughly 2 million households nationwide being denied benefits.

At the same time, the Department of Energy (DOE) is projecting average household expenditures on many heating fuels to rise this winter. DOE projects that average household expenditures on heating oil will rise 12.6 percent nationwide and 14.5 percent in the Northeast. Expenditures on propane are expected to increase nearly 8 percent nationwide and more than 15 percent in the Midwest.

Funding LIHEAP for the remainder of FY2011 at least at the FY2010 level of \$5.1 billion is critical to ensure that low-income families, the disabled, and senior citizens do not have to face a choice between paying their home energy bills or affording other basic necessities such as prescription drugs, housing, and food this winter. Thank you for your continued support of the LIHEAP program and your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

PETER WELCH

Member of Congress