

July 27, 2011

The Honorable Barney Frank  
2252 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Frank:

Even as temperatures in New England near the triple-digit mark this summer, it is not too early to start thinking about the upcoming winter and how low-income seniors and families will be able to cope with the anticipated cold weather. Every year, tens of thousands across our region depend on the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to help pay their heating bills, and federal lawmakers from all over New England have traditionally been among the most stalwart supporters of this valuable program. On behalf of the New England Council, I commend that support, and encourage Congress to provide as significant a level of funding for LIHEAP as possible for the upcoming fiscal year.

In recent years, Congress has provided up to \$5.1 billion in funding for LIHEAP, however the President's budget for fiscal year 2012 recommended \$2.57 billion in funding – nearly a fifty percent drop from this high level. As the economy continues to experience difficulties and the unemployment rate remains stubbornly high, regrettably, more households likely will be eligible for LIHEAP assistance in 2012 than in recent years. Indeed, the number of Americans in poverty is predicted to exceed pre-recession 2008 levels by some 15 to 20 percent. Energy prices also continue to climb; the Energy Department forecasts that next winter's prices will be higher than any other winter heating season during the 2000-10 period.

As Congress pieces together the fiscal year 2012 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Act in the weeks ahead, it is imperative that the less fortunate among us are not forgotten. Winter will be upon us sooner than we realize, and many across New England will face the very real and untenable choice of having to decide between heating their homes or providing for their families. LIHEAP assistance gives individuals and families the assurance that such decisions can be avoided, and the greater the funding level provided by Congress decreases the frequency of these scenarios throughout New England and the nation.

The New England Council has long supported LIHEAP and applauds the past efforts by Congress to maximize funding for this essential program. I extend the hope of the Council that Congress can once again provide a robust level of funding for LIHEAP for fiscal year 2012. If I may be of any assistance or should you require further information on this issue, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Michele M. Jalbert  
Executive Director – Policy & Strategy  
The New England Council

Attachment