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## *National Fuel Funds Network* **Energy Safety Net Bulletin # 173**

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Dear member: Summer LIHEAP Action Day brought over 60 NFFN members and LIHEAP supporters to Washington on August 2 to urge Congress to approve \$5.1 billion in funding for the federal energy assistance program.

Summer Action Day participants took part in more than 100 meetings with Senators, Representatives and Capitol Hill staff members as we continue our efforts to avert the proposed 50 percent cut in funding for LIHEAP for the next fiscal year.

The meetings were conducted in the wake of the tense debate over increasing the federal debt ceiling and amid the uneasiness over how the new legislation mandating cuts in government spending would affect LIHEAP. (See LIHEAP section below.)

While the Summer Action Day supporters were moving around Capitol Hill, NFFN Board Chairman Tom Stovall participated in a conference call with the media. Stovall explained that Summer Action Day was planned to emphasize that energy assistance is a year round need and that cuts to the programs funds could result in the loss of cooling assistance in many states. In addition, the proposed cuts would force states to reduce the numbers of people receiving or the size of heating or cooling grants.

Also taking part in the conference call were Nora Mendez, a former LIHEAP recipient from Arkansas; Mark Wolfe, executive director of the National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA); Willie Whitehead, Section Chief, Energy Division, State of Alabama, Cynthia Zwick, executive director Arizona Community Action Agency Association; Jo-Ann Choate, Chairwoman of NEADA and Energy Policy Advisor, Maine Housing; and John Harvanko, director, Office of Energy Assistance Programs, Minnesota Department of Commerce.

Ms. Mendez told reporters how she had been displaced from her home in Mississippi by hurricane Katrina and relocated to Arkansas with her three children. After moving to Arkansas she faced a series of financial problems that left her unable to pay her utility bills and assistance through LIHEAP helped her avoid disconnection.

The other participants in the media call talked about how devastating the proposed funding cuts would be to the LIHEAP programs in their states. Ms. Zwick said that Arizona is a state where energy assistance is

needed year round and any cuts to the LIHEAP would greatly reduce the effectiveness of the program. Mr. Whitehead stressed the importance of summer cooling aid, and Mr. Harvanko discussed the need for a consistent funding stream to making planning easier. Ms. Choate pointed out that heating fuel costs were still very high thereby reducing the effectiveness of LIHEAP grants.

To view Chairman Stovall's Summer Action Day statement click on the following link  
<http://www.facebook.com/?ref=home#!/pages/National-Fuel-Funds-Network/133167773648>.

In Connecticut, NFFN member Operation Fuel joined with state legislators and other LIHEAP supporters to hold a news conference calling on Congress to approve \$5.1 billion for LIHEAP. Pat Wrice, Operation Fuel's executive director said Connecticut could lose as much as \$57 million in funding if cuts were approved by Congress. Operation Fuel timed the press conference to coincide with Summer LIHEAP Action Day.

To view a video of the Connecticut event click here  
<http://cafca.imageworksllc.com/viewPost.cfm?postID=165>.

On National Night Out, also August 2, Community Action of Minneapolis held a "Save LIHEAP" rally where supporters of the federal energy assistance program urged their Congressional delegation to support \$5.1 billion in funding for LIHEAP.

The next NFFN LIHEAP Action Day is scheduled for February 15, 2012.

### **LIHEAP**

· Legislation providing funding for LIHEAP and other government programs has been delayed by the debate over increasing the government's debt ceiling. Mark-ups of the Health and Human Services appropriations bill scheduled for August have been postponed and Congress will not return to session until after Labor Day.

The new fiscal year begins October 1, and sources on Capitol Hill have indicated that it is unlikely that the Congress could complete work on the appropriations bills before then. The sources said this situation raises the likelihood that Congress would pass a continuing resolution to fund government programs on a short term basis until the appropriations bills could be passed.

The possibility of a continuing resolution further muddles the funding situation for LIHEAP. Under a continuing resolution, funding for LIHEAP could be set at the FY 2011 level of \$4.7 billion or the Congress could choose another figure. We will continue to monitor this situation.

Adding to the confusion over LIHEAP funding is the legislation increasing the federal debt ceiling. This bill includes major cuts in federal spending but it is unclear exactly how the cuts will impact LIHEAP.

An analysis of the legislation prepared by the Center on Budget Policy and Priorities for can be found at <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=3557>.

### **LIHEAP Advocacy**

· The New England Fuel Institute has established a website through which you can send a message to your Congressional delegation urging them to support \$5.1 billion in funding for LIHEAP. The site can be found at <http://capwiz.com/nefi/issues/alert/?alertid=31158511>.

· The Coalition to Keep Michigan Warm has launched a new website designed to increase and support its advocacy for LIHEAP. The site contains information about LIHEAP, news clips, and

information about how to contact Congress to voice your support for LIHEAP. The new site can be found at <http://www.coalitiontokeepmichiganwarm.com/>.

· [www.supportliheap.com](http://www.supportliheap.com) remains open, with a direct line to Congress, to express support for \$5.1 billion for LIHEAP in FY 2012

### **State Court Rulings**

· A Michigan Appeals Court has ruled that the state Public Service Commission no longer has the authority to make gas customers pay for a program that helps low income households pay their gas bills. The ruling came in a suit filed by former Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox and the Association of Business Advocating Tariff Equity that challenged a surcharge on customers of Michigan Consolidated Gas and other utilities that was used to fund the Low Income and Energy Efficiency Fund. In 2010, the fund paid out nearly \$90 million to help low income households pay their gas bills and make their home more energy efficient.

A spokesman for the Commission said the agency is studying the ruling to determine the implications for the fund and what steps the Commission may take next.

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