

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 31, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
330 C Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20416

Dear Secretary Azar:

We respectfully request that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) release the \$900 million provided by Congress for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act as quickly as possible. In addition, we are deeply concerned that HHS has not yet released the \$37 million in LIHEAP funds that Congress restored in the first coronavirus supplemental (P.L. 116-123) and urge you to do so immediately. Together, these funds will provide assistance to approximately three million low-income households when they need it most.

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. As the economic impact of the coronavirus spreads, it will disproportionately hit low-wage workers who often live paycheck to paycheck. In most states, traditional unemployment only covers a portion of a worker's average weekly wages. For these workers, working from home is not an option and a missed paycheck could have a significant impact on their finances. Furthermore, LIHEAP provides a crucial safety net to protect our nation's seniors. In fiscal year 2019, LIHEAP provided heating assistance to more than two million senior households, representing 40 percent of the total households served.

According to the National Energy Assistance Directors' Association (NEADA), states do not have sufficient funds to provide assistance to those losing their jobs. Many states are reporting no surplus of funds or extremely limited funding available. Claims will increase as families struggle to pay their utility bills at the end of the month. Already some areas are reporting that requests for assistance have tripled. Releasing this funding now is critical for state and community organizations to be able to support these families and seniors during this time and provide some measure of stability by assisting with the costs of utilities to keep the lights and heat on and people in their homes.

As states continue to provide assistance to people in need, it is crucial that they have the resources to assist low-income households and seniors as soon as possible. We request that you quickly release all LIHEAP funds in order to allow states to provide this vital assistance. We look forward to continuing to work with you on this critical program, and thank you for your attention to our concerns and those of our constituents.

Sincerely,

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Susan M. Collins
United States Senator

Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

Patty Murray
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Cory Booker
United States Senator

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator

Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

Michael Bennet
United States Senator

Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator