

Murphy Calls on President to Release Emergency Home Heating Funds to Connecticut

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NEW BRITAIN, CT - As Connecticut residents prepare for high home heating bills this winter, Congressman Chris Murphy (CT-5) today called on President Bush to release emergency funds from the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to Connecticut as soon as possible. President Bush has \$120 million at his disposal to help families across the country this winter, \$100 million of which will expire if not released before the end of the federal fiscal year on September 30.

"Here in Connecticut, the cold weather will be here before too long, and unfortunately, high home heating costs are going to force some residents to make an unthinkable choice between life's basic necessities - heat, food, and healthcare. President Bush has only one, simple choice to make - use the money sitting in the bank to help people who are going to need it to heat their homes within the next few months," said Murphy.

LIHEAP is a block grant program that assists states with low-income heating and air conditioning. LIHEAP served 86,000 Connecticut households in Fiscal Year 2007. So far this year, Connecticut has received \$41.8 million in regular funds and \$16.9 million in emergency funds, for a total of \$58.7 million.

Home heating oil in Connecticut currently hovers around an average of \$4 a gallon, an increase of over \$1.50 since this time last year. Connecticut residents are expected to pay between \$3,000 and \$5,000 for heating oil this winter.

Releasing emergency LIHEAP funds this early in the heating season is not unprecedented - Connecticut received emergency funds in early September 2006, when home heating oil was just \$2.52 a gallon.

"The number of Connecticut residents seeking energy assistance has grown every year. This winter many families in crisis will be facing skyrocketing energy prices and increases in the cost of other necessities. Without energy assistance, many Connecticut families will have no where to turn," said Patricia Wrice, Executive Director of Operation Fuel, Inc.

In Connecticut, applications are accepted beginning August 11 but benefits are not distributed until November 3, with an average benefit of \$537. While it can take up to 45 days for an application to be processed, they are usually processed in 2 or 3 weeks. The majority of assistance is provided in the first 3 to 4 months.

Murphy is also pushing for a tripling of funds set aside for LIHEAP if a second economic stimulus package is considered this month.

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