

March 27, 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. As we approach the end of the month, claims will increase as families struggle to pay their utility bills. 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,

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Jack Reed  
United States Senator

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Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator

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