

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 23, 2014

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

A combination of frigid temperatures and higher than anticipated energy prices is creating a dire situation for many Massachusetts households. Now that the omnibus appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2014 has been signed into law, we urge the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to immediately release all remaining funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to help families in Massachusetts and across the country who are struggling to heat their homes. Under the final, full year funding levels set forth in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014, there is still nearly \$490 million that has not yet been distributed by HHS. We urge HHS to immediately release Massachusetts' share of the remaining funds to assist families who are facing a heating crisis this winter.

In December, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) had projected that average winter home heating costs for families in the Northeast would rise this winter for most fuels. EIA had projected an increase of 17 percent in costs this winter for families using natural gas, nine percent for those using propane, and five percent for electricity. However, prices have increased far more than forecast.

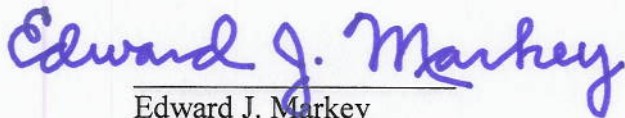
While the EIA had projected that families using heating oil would spend roughly the same amount this winter compared with last year, residential heating oil prices in Massachusetts have increased nearly 25 cents a gallon – or roughly six percent – since the end of October. According to EIA, residential propane prices in Massachusetts have risen 45 cents a gallon – or 15 percent – during that same time, also far outpacing EIA's projections. Natural gas prices in New England have also spiked recently to nearly ten times the Henry Hub price. Many families in Massachusetts and New England are now facing a heating crisis this winter as a result of higher than anticipated energy prices combined with sustained cold temperatures.

LIHEAP funding has already been cut by about one-third over the last four years, leading to a reduction in benefits and the number of families receiving assistance in many states. Releasing the nearly \$490 million in remaining LIHEAP funds for this year as soon as possible is

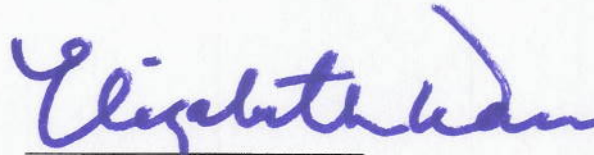
imperative to ensure that families who have already been stretched to the limit by these cuts can continue to pay their heating bills. We urge HHS to immediately release Massachusetts' share of all remaining heating assistance funds for the current year.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Should you have any questions, please have your staff contact Morgan Gray on the staff of Sen. Markey at (202) 224-2742.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator