

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 24, 2015

The Honorable Sylvia Mathews Burwell
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Burwell:


As families in Massachusetts and across the Northeast face record snowfall combined with freezing temperatures, we write to urge you to immediately release as much of the remaining funds for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) as possible under law. Families in our state and across the region are facing a home heating crisis as LIHEAP funds have already been exhausted and extreme cold weather has hit the region. We urge you to release the roughly \$34 million in remaining LIHEAP funds to the states immediately, and consider using the authority provided to you under law to provide additional funding for this vital program.

An appropriations provision provides the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) the authority to transfer up to one percent of appropriated funds between accounts. However, in recent years, HHS has used this authority to transfer funds out of the LIHEAP account to other programs. In both Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 and FY2014, HHS has transferred slightly more than \$34 million out of LIHEAP and into other accounts. We urge you not to use this authority in a similar fashion this year and instead distribute the roughly \$34 million in remaining LIHEAP funds to the states immediately. Such a release could provide more than \$1 million in funding to Massachusetts. Those funds would be incredibly important to families in our state and they should be used for LIHEAP and not transferred to fund other programs.

In addition, we ask that you consider using the authority provided to you in the omnibus appropriations bill passed in December to move additional funding into LIHEAP that could help families this winter. Section 206 of Division G of the omnibus appropriations bill (P.L. 113-235) allows for the transfer of up to three percent in additional funding between programs within HHS. That means that HHS could use its existing authority to transfer an additional roughly \$100 million into the LIHEAP program. Such a transfer could mean that Massachusetts could receive additional LIHEAP funding that could exceed \$5.5 million.

Families in our state are facing a dangerous heating crisis. For low-income families, home heating bills are piling up as fast as the snow, with no relief in sight. We urge you to immediately release the remaining money in the LIHEAP account to aid states this winter and consider using your authority to provide additional funding for LIHEAP to respond to this crisis.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.


EDWARD J. MARKEY
United States Senate

Sincerely,


ELIZABETH WARREN
United States Senate