

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 11, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

The sudden termination of federal staff at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) responsible for administering the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) has devastating implications for families across Massachusetts. Our constituents are facing historic energy burdens, yet you have eliminated the federal team that ensures this vital safety net program can function. The Department of Health and Human Services must take immediate steps to restore federal LIHEAP capacity.

Over the past decade, Massachusetts energy prices have risen two to three times more than the national average.¹ This winter alone, rate increases in Massachusetts hit families hard, with some energy bills doubling over the heating season.² In Boston, residents face some of the highest heating costs among cities nationwide.³ This means that many Massachusetts families are struggling to pay their utility bills. As of September 2024, on average, residential gas and electric consumers carried approximately \$997 in past due bills — a roughly 75% increase over September 2019.⁴ At the same time, climate change is intensifying the frequency and severity of extreme weather, increasing heating and cooling demand, and placing greater financial strains on low-income households.⁵ The result is an affordability crisis for families already on the financial edge.

Yet on April 1, 2025, as part of a larger purge of federal employees from HHS, the entire LIHEAP staff was let go.⁶ According to press reports, approximately 25 HHS employees had

¹ Mike Silvia, *Massachusetts natural gas prices up 93%, electricity up 65% the last 10 years*, Fall River Reporter, (Mar. 31, 2025), <https://fallriverreporter.com/massachusetts-natural-gas-prices-up-93-electricity-up-65-the-last-10-years/>.

² Jon Chesto, *Amid rising energy bills, senators ask Mass. regulators to revisit natural gas rates*, Boston Globe, (Feb. 17, 2025), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/02/17/business/energy-bills-senators-natural-gas-rates/>.

³ Sabrina Shankman, *In Boston, home energy bills are among the highest in the nation*, Boston Globe, (Sept. 16, 2024), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2024/09/16/science/boston-energy-bills-among-steepest-in-nation/>.

⁴ *Massachusetts Discount Rate Customers Falling Further Behind on Utility Bills*, National Consumer Law Center (Mar. 2025), https://www.nclc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Issue-Brief_Massachusetts-Discount-Rate-Customers-Falling-Farther-Behind-on-Utility-Bills.pdf; Extreme Weather Events, Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Mass.gov (2025), <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/extreme-weather-events>; Hunza Irfan, *Addressing Energy Burden in the Northeast*, Northeast energy Efficiency Partnerships (Aug. 27, 2024), <https://neep.org/blog/addressing-energy-burden-northeast>.

⁵ Extreme Weather Events, Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Mass.gov (2025), <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/extreme-weather-events>; Hunza Irfan, *Addressing Energy Burden in the Northeast*, Northeast energy Efficiency Partnerships (Aug. 27, 2024), <https://neep.org/blog/addressing-energy-burden-northeast>.

been overseeing the program.⁷ As Mark Wolfe, executive director of the National Energy Assistance Directors Association, described it: “They fired everybody, there’s nobody left to do anything. Either this was incredibly sloppy, or they intend to kill the program altogether.”⁸

LIHEAP is a critical federal safety net program for offsetting high energy costs. According to the Massachusetts Association for Community Action, Massachusetts has seen more than 181,000 requests for heating assistance so far this fiscal year, with more than 110,000 households already served through March 31.⁹ First-time applicants have also surged: more than 27,000 Massachusetts households applied for LIHEAP for the first time this year, 8% more than last year at this point. Further, more than 58% of households served so far this year include at least one elderly member, more than 33% include individuals with disabilities, more than 6,500 include a Veteran or Active Duty Military member, and more than 11,500 include young children under age five. As energy costs rise, these households are often the first to fall behind on bills and the least able to afford medical care or food if their utilities are disconnected.

Critically, Massachusetts is still waiting on HHS to release the remaining estimated 10% of FY2025 LIHEAP funds, totaling approximately \$15 million.¹⁰ As Liz Berube, secretary for the Massachusetts Association for Community Action and executive director of Citizens for Citizens, Inc., has explained: “LIHEAP saves lives by providing heating and cooling assistance to millions of households throughout the country, of which over 150,000 are from Massachusetts. While we in Massachusetts are continuing to operate our program now, we are very concerned that our remaining unreleased funds will be detrimental to the program, and without the HHS LIHEAP staff the stability and integrity of this program could be in jeopardy for the future.” Indeed, without federal staff to oversee the release of those funds, thousands of families could be left in limbo. Further, the removal of the federal staff responsible for managing LIHEAP risks not only current-year operations for these households but jeopardizes preparations for next season.

Although LIHEAP is structured as a block grant administered primarily by states, federal staff provide essential technical assistance — from calculating the complicated allocation formula and distributing block grant funds, to guiding new state LIHEAP directors, reviewing and approving state plans, and monitoring state program implementation. This is not red tape, it is essential governance. Despite serving more than 5 million households nationwide, the entire federal LIHEAP team consisted of only 25 staff — an example of efficient, high-impact federal support.¹¹

⁶ Brad Plummer, *Entire Staff Is Fired at Office That Helps Poorer Americans Pay for Heating*, N.Y. Times (Apr. 2, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/02/climate/trump-layoffs-energy-assistance-liheap.html>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Nick Stoico, *Trump administration fired staff of program that helps low-income Americans pay for heat. What does it mean for Mass.?*, Boston Globe (Apr. 4, 2025), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/04/04/metro/liheap-program-cuts-massachusetts/>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ LIHEAP Fact Sheet, Office of the Administration for Children & Families, Department of Health and Human Services, acf.gov, <https://acf.gov/ocs/fact-sheet/liheap-fact-sheet>

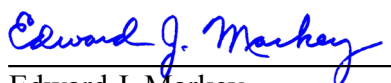
Finally, these terminations undercut public confidence. They send a dangerous message that programs serving low-income, elderly, and disabled populations are expendable. When federal staff vanish overnight, without notice, contingency planning, or a clear replacement structure, it undermines decades of trust and partnership. It also forces states into crisis planning mode, when they should be focused on delivering services and preparing for upcoming cooling and heating seasons.

To help us better understand how HHS intends to ensure LIHEAP’s continued operation following the staff termination, please respond in writing to the following questions by May 1, 2025:

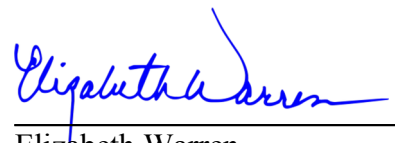
1. How does HHS plan to preserve the continuity of LIHEAP operations nationwide? Were the terminations, as Mark Wolfe put it, “incredibly sloppy” or did you intend to kill the LIHEAP program?
2. How does HHS plan to ensure that states such as Massachusetts can timely access the remaining FY2025 LIHEAP funds appropriated by Congress?
3. With the termination of the LIHEAP staff, who within HHS is now responsible for the program’s operation?
 - a. How does HHS plan to oversee state LIHEAP plan development, approval, and benefit formula modeling?
 - b. Who is now responsible for reviewing and posting states’ quarterly LIHEAP reports, and what plans are in place to ensure continued program monitoring and transparency as required under by law?
 - c. Who at HHS is now responsible for managing the end-of year reallocation of unspent state LIHEAP funds?
4. Does HHS intend to restore the terminated positions or provide an equivalent staffing structure before the 2025–2026 heating season begins?
5. What measures will HHS implement to ensure communications with state program administrators on vendor enrollment, rule changes, and reporting compliance?
6. Has HHS consulted — formally or informally — with state LIHEAP administrators or community action agencies about these staff terminations, either before or after they occurred? If so, please provide a summary.

Massachusetts families depend on LIHEAP to stay safe, healthy, and housed. It is the federal government’s responsibility to ensure they do not lose this support when they need it most. We look forward to your prompt responses to our questions.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress



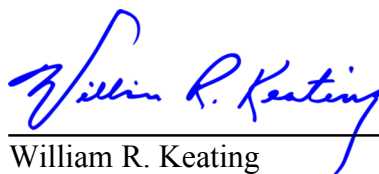
Richard E. Neal
Member of Congress



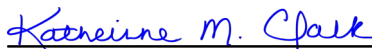
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Jake Auchincloss
Member of Congress



William R. Keating
Member of Congress



Katherine M. Clark
Member of Congress



Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



Lori Trahan
Member of Congress



Stephen F. Lynch
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