

Press Release

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Contact: Mark Wolfe, 202-625-0308

Statement in Response to the Administration's FY 2020 Budget Proposal to Eliminate the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program

The National Energy Assistance Directors' Association (NEADA), representing the state directors of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) strongly opposes the Administration's proposal to eliminate funding for LIHEAP.

Mark Wolfe, Executive Director of NEADA, stated, "this is the third year in a row now that the Administration has proposed to zero out funding for LIHEAP. If the Administration had succeeded in its objective in eliminating funding last year, the 6.1 million poor families receiving LIHEAP would have literally been left out in the cold this winter, with many having to choose between paying for food or their energy bill. There is absolutely no evidence to support the Administration's position that *LIHEAP is no longer necessary.*"

The Administration has not Issued a Rational for Eliminating LIHEAP: At this point the Administration has not issued a public statement explaining their position for eliminating LIHEAP. According to John Harvanko, Chair of NEADA, "this is an especially painful cut to a program that helps some of the nation's poorest households afford their home energy bills. Too many families face anguished choices between having heat, or food and medicines. This program is a critical safety net for our most vulnerable citizens."

How Important is LIHEAP? The 2018 National Energy Assistance Survey¹, completed by NEADA found that one third of low-income American households who received LIHEAP help last year to pay utility bills received shut-off notices that caused many families to go without food or medicines to pay them, and 15 percent had their heat and light shut off before receiving LIHEAP assistance. The poor are hit hard by energy bills, which take about 12 percent out of a low-income paycheck, but only 2.7 percent from households with higher wages. In winter the heating bill can cost a poor family 25 percent of its income.

LIHEAP's impact in many cases goes beyond providing bill payment assistance by playing a crucial role in maintaining family stability and improving health outcomes for vulnerable populations. It enables elderly citizens to live independently and ensures that young children have safe, warm homes to live in. Although the circumstances that lead each client to seek LIHEAP assistance are different, LIHEAP links these stories by enabling people to cope with difficult circumstances with dignity.

NEADA strongly urges the Congress to reject the Administration's proposal and instead maintain funding for this vital program to ensure the country's most vulnerable families can heat and cool their homes in the coming year.

NEADA is the primary educational and policy organization for the state LIHEAP directors. LIHEAP is a federal program providing formula grants to help low-income families pay their heating and cooling bills.

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¹ The NEADA survey, <http://neada.org/program-policy-reports/liheapsurvey/> underlines the agonizing choices faced by low-income households that struggle to pay their utility bills.