

March 25, 2020

The Honorable Steve Daines
The Honorable Jon Tester
The Honorable Greg Gianforte

To the members of the Montana Congressional Delegation:

The undersigned organizations, representing consumer advocacy, clean energy, environmental groups, electric and gas utilities, and others, respectfully request your support for at least \$1.4 billion in additional funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to address impacts related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and resulting economic impacts. We have heard that the current stimulus package being negotiated in Congress may include \$900 million for LIHEAP – we urge you to support this level now, and consider an additional appropriation of at least \$500 million in future stimulus efforts.

Currently, an estimated 5.4 million families receive LIHEAP funds annually—these families are below 150% of the federal poverty threshold or 60% of state median income¹. In a typical year, LIHEAP serves just a fraction of households that are eligible for assistance. This year, as a result of the COVID-19 emergency, many more households will qualify for and need assistance dollars. \$1.4 billion in supplemental funding would assist up to 4 million more households nationally².

In the face of this emergency, families are staying home, which means their home energy bills will increase. Utilities have reacted quickly; many have already announced that they are suspending disconnections for all customers and will not charge late fees on overdue bills. In the longer term, however, this will most certainly mean that customer bills will accrue to high levels—high enough that families who are already struggling financially, or those hard hit by the impacts of COVID-19, will be unable to pay the balances.

As more families enter quarantine based on public health guidance and government requirements, programs like LIHEAP ensure that the most vulnerable can safely and healthily stay in their homes and follow these recommendations and orders. While our values urge us to protect the most impacted individuals and communities during national emergencies, science requires it—we can only protect ourselves collectively when every individual is able to comply with public health guidelines.

As organizations that work in the energy sector, we know that access to reliable, affordable energy is necessary to have a healthy home and to meet basic needs like heating, cooling, and food preparation. Your support for maximizing LIHEAP funding with at least \$1.4 billion dollars in additional assistance is a small but essential step our national leadership can take to

¹ https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/AG-2019/05-04_LIHEAP.pdf

² <https://neuac.org/>

provide tangible assistance to families who are struggling to pay their bills during this emergency.

Sincerely,

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