

May 7, 2026

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Capito, Ranking Member Baldwin, Chair Aderholt, and Ranking Member DeLauro,

WE ACT for Environmental Justice (WE ACT) respectfully urges the Subcommittee to **appropriate the maximum authorized level of \$5.1 billion for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) in the Fiscal Year 2027 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.** WE ACT is a community-based organization headquartered in Northern Manhattan dedicated to advancing environmental and climate justice, including reducing energy burdens, protecting the health, and strengthening climate resilience of environmental justice communities.

LIHEAP is a bipartisan, broadly supported program that helps millions of families with home utility bill assistance. Through the annual appropriations process in particular, Congress has consistently made clear that energy affordability is a bipartisan priority. As our nation faces a severe and worsening energy affordability crisis, support for LIHEAP is more urgent than ever. The consequences of failing to provide a substantial increase in program funding this year are dire— arrearages will increase, power will be shut off to households, and the impacts of extreme cold and extreme heat will have severe health consequences, especially for low-income and communities of color.

Energy Affordability Crisis

People across America are facing an acute energy affordability crisis. Between 2022 and 2025, household utility bills increased by 13 percent.¹ According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics Consumer Price Index Survey for March 2026, home energy prices are rising 2.5 times faster than the rate of inflation.² Thirty-four percent of adults making under \$25,000 annually reported they are unable to pay their bills in full,³ while 40 percent of households earning under \$50,000 per year reported they were unable to pay their monthly energy bill at least once this year, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration and U.S. Federal Reserve, respectively.⁴

Indigenous and other communities of color face the highest energy burdens, often spending more than 6% of their income on energy bills—far above the national average.⁵ These inequities stem from historic and ongoing disparities in housing quality, community investment, and access to energy-saving upgrades. They also compound climate vulnerability, as communities already burdened by high energy costs are more exposed to climate-driven hazards like extreme heat and cold. The elderly and disabled are also among the most vulnerable to extreme temperatures, and many rely on Social Security or other forms of fixed income which cannot keep pace with rising prices.

This crisis is also now compounded by the war in Iran, which is causing a surge in gasoline and grocery prices, pushing households to their limits. Consumer prices rose 0.9 percent from February to March 2026, accompanied by the largest monthly gas price hike in six decades.⁶ These interrelated economic crises are forcing households to choose between paying for food, medicine, water, and keeping their homes at a safe temperature. LIHEAP is a proven tool in our federal government's toolbox to relieve household budget pressure with a decades-long track record of success. Created in the wake of the energy crisis of the 1970s, LIHEAP has effectively served its mission since 1981. However, chronic underfunding has limited the program's reach, supporting only a fraction of eligible households in most states.⁷

¹ <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=65284>

² U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics March 2026 Consumer Price Index Summary, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/cpi.nr0.htm>

³ US Energy Information Administration, Residential Energy Consumption Survey, March 2026, https://www.eia.gov/consumption/residential/data/2024/hc/pdf/HC11.1_2024.pdf

⁴ US Federal Reserve, Economic Wellbeing of U.S. Households in 2024 Report, <https://www.federalreserve.gov/publications/files/2024-report-economic-well-being-us-households-202505.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.aceee.org/energy-burden>

⁶ Rugabear, C. (April 10, 2026) War in Iran Sends Inflation Soaring and the Mood of Consumers Plunging. Associated Press,

<https://apnews.com/article/inflation-prices-gas-federal-reserve-trump-bf00c3105d5da88a0b01d9107ed4ecee>

⁷ U.S. Dep't of Health & Hum. Servs., Off. of Cmty. Servs., LIHEAP Clearinghouse Data, <https://liheapch.acf.hhs.gov> (last visited Apr. 22, 2025).

LIHEAP: A Crucial Safety Net for Low-Income New Yorkers

In New York City, nearly 30% of households are energy burdened, meaning they spend more than 6% of their income on utilities.⁸ This burden disproportionately falls on low-income Black and Latino residents in historically redlined neighborhoods such as the South Bronx, East New York, and Central Harlem—areas where residents are also more likely to live in poorly insulated and energy-inefficient housing and therefore spend more on their energy bills than residents in newer housing stock. LIHEAP prevented over 100,000 service disconnections in the state in FY2023.⁹ Even still, in the same year, LIHEAP served nearly 1.2 million New Yorkers, despite there being 2.2 million eligible residents in the state.¹⁰

LIHEAP is oversubscribed. As extreme heat events become more and more common, LIHEAP needs more funding, not less. In New York City and New York State, demand for LIHEAP has outstripped the program funding. In April of 2026, applications opened to eligible New York City households with children under six and adults over 60 for free home air conditioning units. These units are critical to maintaining a safe indoor air temperature in the communities that WE ACT for Environmental Justice serves. However, many applicants will not receive units this summer due to inadequate funding. In 2024, the most recent year with available data, this program saw the highest number of applicants in six years.¹¹ Only about half of the eligible applicants were served. Since 2024, the energy crisis has worsened, portending another year in which these residents are left without utility support and heating and cooling relief. New York State receives the largest LIHEAP allocation in the country—nearly two times the second-largest allotment (Pennsylvania). Yet, it regularly runs out of funding for its cooling assistance program.¹²

Climate Change, Energy Insecurity, and Environmental Justice

With increasing climate volatility, energy insecurity has become a public health crisis. On June 24, 2025, a record-shattering heat wave hit New York City, pushing temperatures at John F Kennedy and LaGuardia airports to 102°F and a record 99°F in Central Park.¹³ The high temperatures were caused by a heat dome, an increasingly common summer phenomenon.

⁸ N.Y.C. Env't Just. All., NYC Energy Burden Report (2023), <https://www.nyc-eja.org/publications/energyburden2023>.

⁹ National Energy Utility Affordability Coalition, FY2023 New York Fact Sheet, <https://neuac.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/New-York-State-Sheet-2025.pdf>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ New York City Office of Temporary Disability Assistance, April 2025 Letter: New York City Comments on the development of the 2025-2026 New York State Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) Plan <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/public/comments/comment-04292025-heap-plan.pdf>

¹² WE ACT for Environmental Justice. LIHEAP Needs a Lifeline (2024), <https://weact.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/LIHEAP-Report.pdf>

¹³ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, June 2025 Monthly Review and Heat Wave, <https://www.weather.gov/okx/June2025heat>

According to the 2025 New York City Health Department Heat Mortality Report, an estimated 525 New York City residents died due to heat related illness last summer.¹⁴ Due to structural racism that creates inequities in housing, healthcare, and pollution, Black New York City residents are twice as likely to die from heat related stress than their white neighbors even though they make up less than 25% of the city's population.^{15,16} Conversely, a cold snap this winter saw the weather-related death of an elderly East Harlem resident living in public housing, who was found covered up in blankets to keep warm.¹⁷ This is an unacceptable reality when supportive programs exist to avoid this exact outcome.

LIHEAP not only helps households pay their utility bills, but also supports weatherization and energy efficiency improvements, which reduce long-term energy costs, improves indoor air quality, and enhances resilience to extreme weather, critical for frontline communities already bearing the brunt of environmental degradation and climate vulnerabilities

Timely Allocation of Funds is Critical to States

We are deeply troubled that the Trump Administration withheld Fiscal Year 2026 LIHEAP funds. As you know, after several demands from a bipartisan group of Members of Congress, the Office of Management and Budget released the remaining \$400 million in Fiscal Year 2026 LIHEAP funding to states. This request was the second from Congress to the Administration to release withheld funds this year, with an earlier tranche of \$3.7 billion withheld until November of 2025.

These disruptions jeopardized the continuity of life-saving assistance, placing additional strain on state and municipal agencies, tasked with implementing the program on the ground. As a result of delays, states like New York are forced to operate under uncertainty, delaying outreach and enrollment while vulnerable residents face another summer of dangerous heat without assurance of relief. The summer months are crucial because over the past few years, the LIHEAP program in New York State has consistently run out of funding in early July, the part of the summer most prone to heat waves.¹⁸

¹⁴ 2025 New York City Health Department Heat Mortality Report, <https://a816-dohbesp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/data-features/heat-report/>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau.(2025) *Quick Facts*: New York, New York. Retrieved May 6, 2026 from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/newyorkcitynewyork/PST045225>

¹⁷ Amsterdam News, March 5, 2026

<https://amsterdamnews.com/news/2026/03/05/nycha-tenantdeath-sparks-renewed-housing-heat-outcry/>

¹⁸ Lin, Anthony, and Brian A. Colle. "Long-Term Trends in Heat Wave Gaps for the New York City Metropolitan Area." *Urban Climate*, vol. 59, 24 Dec. 2024, p. 102247, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212095524004449, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.uclim.2024.102247>.

A Popular, Bipartisan Program

We are grateful for your leadership on this critical program in Fiscal Year 2026, when the Committee rejected the President's request to eliminate the program and provided a \$20 million dollar increase over Fiscal Year 2025. Congress also rebuked the President's request to eliminate the program during his first term in office, demonstrating a strong pattern of support.

Additionally, polling data shows that the vast majority (75 percent) of Americans support LIHEAP.¹⁹ WE ACT for Environmental Justice's own polling has similarly revealed that 74 percent of voters nationwide have bipartisan support for the program, with 92% of surveyed Democrats and 56 percent of Republicans indicating support.²⁰

Staffing

Finally, we have serious concerns about the program's ability to operate without dedicated staff. In April of 2025, as part of a gutting of the Department of Health and Human Services capacity, the agency fired the entire LIHEAP staff.²¹ Federal LIHEAP program staff play a critical role in administering the program and ensuring the annual plans are reviewed and approved that helps millions of low-income households across the country. We urge the committees to provide the funds necessary to restore staffing to pre-FY26 levels.

Provide Full Funding for LIHEAP

We respectfully request the subcommittee appropriate the full \$5.1 billion authorized under the Energy Policy Act of 2005, 42 U.S.C. § 8621 and work to ensure that the Fiscal Year 2027 funds are allocated on time.²² Fully funding LIHEAP will allow the program to support more families under the strain of current economic conditions to live in healthy and safe indoor environments. LIHEAP funding should increase on pace with rising energy prices and increased energy needs due to intensifying climate change. A liveable home is a basic necessity. No person or family should lose their life because of their race or income level. Heat and cold-related deaths are some of the most tragic and the most preventable. Victims, especially the elderly, often die alone in their homes or apartments and are found later by neighbors or family. For households facing high energy burdens, disproportionately low income and people of color are forced to make impossible choices between keeping their home at a safe temperature and other critical needs,

¹⁹ Data for Progress, 28 Apr. 2025, www.dataforprogress.org/datasets/polling-on-liheap. Accessed 6 May 2025.

²⁰ Embold Research and WE ACT for Environmental Justice (2025), WE ACT Healthy Homes Survey <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/66b25a67d694ff578ea46977/t/681bbab8f3f2343441eb74fb/1746647740097/W+E+ACT+ +Healthy+Homes+First+Polling+Presentation+%26+Report+ +May+2025.pdf>

²¹ Franzin, R. April 2, 2025. HHS Fires Entire Staff of Program That Helps Low Income People Afford Heat and Air Conditionin, The Hill <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/5228186-hhs-fires-entire-staff-of-program-that-helps-low-income-people-afford-heat-and-air-conditioning/>

²² Energy Policy Act of 2005, Pub. L. No. 109-58, 119 Stat. 594 (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 8621).

like food or medicine, leading to dire consequences. We urge you to give LIHEAP a lifeline.
Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Leslie G. Fields
Chief Federal Officer, WE ACT for Environmental Justice

CC: The Honorable Charles Schumer
Democratic Leader Chair of the Senate

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader