



ORA

Office of Ratepayer Advocates
California Public Utilities Commission
505 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, California 94102
Tel: 415-703-1584
<http://ora.ca.gov>

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Matthew Marcus (916) 327-3455, Matthew.Marcus@cpuc.ca.gov

OFFICE OF RATEPAYER ADVOCATES DIRECTOR ELIZABETH ECHOLS JOINS 35 ATTORNEYS GENERAL AND STATE CONSUMER ADVOCATE AGENCIES TO OPPOSE ELIMINATION OF CRITICAL LOW-INCOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

SAN FRANCISCO, July 31, 2017 – The Office of Ratepayer Advocates (ORA) Director Elizabeth Echols today joined 35 attorneys general and state consumer advocate agencies to protect low-income households by urging Congress to preserve and expand Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) funding in the 2018 federal budget.

In a letter submitted to Congress today, the attorneys general and advocates conveyed the importance of LIHEAP and WAP to their states and expressed opposition to the proposed elimination or reduction of their funding within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service’s Office of Community Services budget.

“These programs help prevent vulnerable people from having to choose between keeping the lights on and paying for food or other necessities,” said Elizabeth Echols, Director of ORA. *“Without these programs, millions of low-income people would lack access to the essential utility services they need for daily life.”*

“Since 1981, LIHEAP has helped millions of vulnerable residents retain essential utility service, thereby protecting public health and safety, reducing homelessness and ensuring the stability of utility revenues. In Fiscal Year (“FY”) 2017 alone, it is expected that about 6.1 million households nationwide will receive heating and cooling assistance through LIHEAP. The Program operates in every state and the District of Columbia, as well as on most tribal reservations and U.S. territories,” the letter stated.

The attorneys general and advocates emphasized the role both LIHEAP and WAP play in aiding low-income residents in paying for their home energy costs. Annual distributions of LIHEAP funds specifically prioritize seniors and families with small children. Seventy percent of recipient households have at least one member who is elderly or disabled, or have a child under the age of six.

Likewise, the Weatherization Assistance Program has served 7 million households over 40 years. The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that WAP has helped low-income households reduce their total energy expenditures by 23 percent per year, allowing participating households to allocate scarce resources for other necessities.

The attorneys general and advocates note that anticipated funding for FY 2017 does not come close to meeting the extraordinary need for either of these funds. According to the National Energy Assistance

Directors' Association, only 19 percent of eligible households are expected to be served. Since 2010, congressional funding for LIHEAP has fallen by more than a third. This decrease in funding has resulted in more than one million fewer eligible households receiving critical energy assistance. The attorneys general and advocates urge Congress to restore and increase LIHEAP funding, so that fewer families are "left out in the cold."

"LIHEAP and WAP funds have provided a critical lifeline to customers who struggle each month to pay for life's necessities by assisting them to remain connected to essential utility services. We strongly urge you to oppose any measure that would reduce or eliminate funding for these critical programs, and instead increase these essential and cost-effective services," the letter concluded.

Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan led the coalition of attorneys general and advocates in filing today's letter from the following states: AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, FL, HI, IA, KS, KY, MA, ME, MD, MN, MS, MT, NH, NJ, NM, NY, OR, PA, RI, UT, VT, WA, WV, WY.

A copy of the letter can be found at <http://ora.cpuc.ca.gov/newsroom.aspx>.

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