

MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
WEST END PLACE

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The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

March 11, 2011

Dear Majority Leader Reid, Minority Leader McConnell,
Speaker Boehner and Minority Leader Pelosi:

As Roman Catholic Bishops in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, we write in support of the Low Income Home Energy Heating Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and wish to express our concern about the recently proposed cuts of \$2.57 billion for Fiscal Year 2012 from the program's current funding of \$5.1 billion. We urge Congress to maintain current funding levels for this critical program.

This winter, residents throughout the nation, especially in the Northeast, have endured long stretches of severely low temperatures, harsh storms, and record high home-heating costs. The proposed cuts to LIHEAP would deny over 3 million qualified American families essential heating assistance.

Thus, if enacted, the cuts would be nothing short of devastating, especially in the Northeast, to these families and their communities.

The recent economic downturn has created a punishing intersection of rising human needs and declining resources. This situation threatens the dignity of the human person and the stability of family life. We are aware that our country's distressed financial circumstances impose a heightened need for funding restraints and we recognize that, as a result, lawmakers face excruciating choices.

Our plea is that, when considering how to navigate through this difficult budgeting process, Congress preserve a special place and regard for the most vulnerable of our citizens, particularly those whose precarious economic circumstances force them to choose between shelter and clothing or between heat and food. We pledge the utmost efforts of our own social service agencies; but our resources by themselves do not suffice when providing assistance.

The challenge is to sustain a social safety net in the most efficient manner, not by risking the quality or type of services most needed, but by maximizing the effectiveness of good programs. Programs rooted in the protection and nurturance of the dignity of the human person represent those which are most likely to provide long-term benefits. We recognize LIHEAP as one such program, as it protects and promotes the common good in a particularly crucial way.

Therefore, we respectfully request that Congress maintain current funding levels for LIHEAP in next year's federal budget. Thank you in advance for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley O.F.M. Cap.
Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Boston

Most Rev. George W. Coleman
Bishop of the Diocese of Fall River

Most Rev. Timothy A. McDonnell
Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield

Most Rev. Robert J. McManus
Bishop of the Diocese of Worcester

cc: Members of the US Senate and US House Delegation from Massachusetts