

## Michaud Announces Release of LIHEAP Contingency Funds for Maine

Wednesday, September 17 2008

WASHINGTON, DC

- Today, Congressman Mike Michaud announced that the Department of Health and Human Services will release the remaining contingency funds within the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) for FY 2008, along with non-expiring contingency funds. A total of \$120.7 million will be distributed to states and territories for LIHEAP as a result of this action.

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"While I am pleased that the administration has answered our call to release contingency funding, I will continue to push our congressional leaders to move a bill that provides more LIHEAP funding for those in need," said Michaud. "As tens of thousands of Mainer's know too well, trying to heat your home is harder and harder with increasing energy prices, especially when you are on a fixed income. Too many Mainers this winter will face unacceptable choices like whether to heat their homes or put food on the table. We can make sure that this choice is not forced upon our families by passing a significant increase in LIHEAP funding."

The following is a breakdown of the funds release to New England. More than 25% of the total release (roughly \$33.1 million) went to New England.

Connecticut

\$6,962,123

Maine

\$7,067,286

Massachusetts

\$11,501,835

New Hampshire

\$3,192,599

Rhode Island

\$1,925,448

Vermont

\$2,486,774

The letter that Michaud sent to the President is below. In addition to this letter, Michaud has consistently supported fully funding the LIHEAP program with at least \$5.1 billion.

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September 10, 2008

President George W. Bush

The White House

Washington, D.C.

Dear President Bush,

As members of Congress from New England, we write you today to urge the immediate release of \$120 million in remaining contingency funds for the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), to help cushion the impact of rising home heating oil costs on many of our most vulnerable constituents. With home heating oil prices in New England this winter expected to have risen this winter by an average of nearly \$2 a gallon over last year, many families simply will be unable to afford to heat their homes. Of the more than 8.5 million American households that use home heating oil, 2.5 million of them - nearly 30 percent - are located in the six New England states alone.

Currently, \$100 million remains in unexpended LIHEAP contingency funds for Fiscal Year 2008, as well an additional \$20 million in non-expiring funds from Fiscal Year 2005. The release of these remaining funds will help cushion the impact of out-of-control home heating prices on vulnerable poor, elderly, and disabled populations, whose fixed incomes cannot keep pace with the increasing cost of heating their homes. Indeed, these skyrocketing energy prices are already forcing working families to make difficult sacrifices. The National Energy Assistance Director's Association (NEADA) reported earlier this summer that more than 15 million

households nationwide are currently facing utility shutoffs because they simply cannot afford to pay their energy bills, an increase of nearly 15% from a year ago.

Releasing LIHEAP contingency before the winter arrives an approach that has effectively mitigated the problem of high energy prices in past years. A release of funds now could allow families to secure heating oil for the coming season before prices climb even higher. Most recently, on September 12, 2006, you released \$79.96 million in emergency LIHEAP funds to 14 states, including all six New England states. That disbursement was targeted to those states that had experienced the coldest wintertime temperatures and where 15 percent or more of low-income households relied on home heating oil. At the time, Secretary Leavitt said, "This assistance will help states prepare for heating costs this fall and winter. With this funding, the Bush Administration is helping those in need by ensuring their homes are kept warm during the winter months." Since that time, the need for home heating assistance has only increased.

Because of funding limitations, only 16% of households eligible for LIHEAP actually receive any assistance. With the alarming spike in heating oil costs, demand is likely to grow significantly this coming winter. While we need to pursue a variety of long-term solutions to stabilize the cost of heating oil and to better conserve energy, the release of these remaining emergency LIHEAP funds for FY 2008 will provide an important source of short-term relief for struggling American families.

Thank you for your attention to this issue of profound importance.

Sincerely,

cc: Secretary Mike Leavitt,  
Department of Health and Human Services