STATE AFFAIRS
WISPOLITICS
Wisconsin's Premier Political News Service

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Seeks swift release of LIHEAP heating help

Posted on Monday, Oct 19, 2020

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. Get the app or access via desktop.

WASHINGTON, D.C. – With colder weather approaching and energy costs projected to increase this winter, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and her colleagues are urging the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to release funds for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) as swiftly and at the highest level possible under the current continuing resolution. The Senators, led by Jack Reed (D-RI) and Susan Collins (R-ME), say the federal LIHEAP funding is a crucial lifeline that assists low-income households and seniors on fixed incomes in paying their energy bills and staying safe during the winter. HHS typically releases 90 percent of the $3.7 billion full year appropriation under a continuing resolution.

The Senators wrote, *"As the main federal program that helps low-income households and seniors with their energy bills, LIHEAP provides critical assistance during the cold winter and hot summer months. October marks the start of the heating season for many states and low-income families and seniors will be facing additional strains on their household budgets. In addition, millions of low-income families, including seniors, are facing new and severe financial hardship due to the coronavirus, making the assistance provided through LIHEAP more important than ever."*

They continued, *"As state agencies work to prepare their LIHEAP programs for the coming winter, it is crucial that they have the resources they need to assist low-income households and seniors as soon as possible, especially in light of the current health crisis. As such, we request that you quickly release LIHEAP funds at the highest level possible to allow states to prepare for the upcoming season, so that*

low-income households do not have to choose between paying for heat and affording other necessities like food or medicine."

The average cost of home heating is unaffordable for millions of low-income households, costing an average of $911 per year nationally. LIHEAP is a federally funded program that helps low-income households with their home energy bills by providing payment and/or energy crisis assistance. The timely release of these funds will provide critical assistance to families and seniors, as well as individuals who have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic. According to the National Energy Assistance Directors' Association, 15 to 20 percent of residential customers are at least 60 days behind on their electric and natural gas bills. As of July 31, 2020, these resulting overdue electric bills are estimated to be between $8 billion and $9.9 billion, and between $975 million and $1.3 billion for overdue natural gas bills.

In addition to Senators Baldwin, Reed and Collins, the bipartisan letter was signed by Senators Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Patty Murray (D-WA), John Hoeven (R-ND), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Bob Casey (D-PA), Tina Smith (D-MN), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Angus King (I-ME), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Ed Markey (D-MA), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Chris Coons (D-DE), Gary Peters (D-MI), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Mark Warner (D-VA), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Joe Manchin (D-WV), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Doug Jones (D-AL), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL).

Full text of the letter is available here.

An online version of this release is available here.