

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: With temperatures forecast to fall and energy costs projected to rise, Baldwin calls for swift release of LIHEAP heating help

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Washington, D.C. - With colder weather around the corner and energy costs projected to precipitously increase this winter, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) joined a bipartisan group of 38 Senators in 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.

In a letter led by Jack Reed (D-RI) and Susan Collins (R-ME), the Senators say the federal LIHEAP funding is a crucial lifeline that assists low-income households and seniors on fixed incomes pay their energy bills and stay safe during the winter. Nationwide, an estimated 5.3 million households received assistance with heating and cooling costs through LIHEAP in 2020. The average cost of home heating is unaffordable for millions of low-income households, costing over \$900 per year nationally.

“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 Senators wrote.**

With prices surging worldwide for heating oil, natural gas, and other fuels, the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) is projecting increasing prices for home heating this winter. The [EIA's Winter Fuels Outlook](#) reports households nationwide could see their heating bills jump as much as 54 percent over last winter. The EIA projects average bills of \$1,734 for home heating oil, up from an average of \$1,210 last year for the Northeast. The EIA also projects that Northeast customers who use natural gas will see their bills rise to \$865, up from \$731 last year. New England, which experiences colder winters than the rest of the region, could be pinched even harder.

LIHEAP is a federally funded program that helps low-income households with their home energy bills by providing payment and/or energy crisis assistance to pay for gas, electric, and other methods customers use to heat their homes. LIHEAP is administered by states and accessed through local Community Action Agencies. Eligibility for LIHEAP is based on income, family size, and the availability of resources.

Senior citizens and those receiving Social Security Disability or SSI benefits are encouraged to apply as early as possible, but applications will be open to everyone through spring of 2022 — or until the funding is exhausted.

In addition to Senators Baldwin, Reed and Collins, the bipartisan letter was signed by Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Angus King (I-ME), Tina Smith (D-MN), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Gary Peters (D-MI), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Raphael Warnock (D-GA), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Joe Manchin (D-WV), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Benjamin Cardin (D-MD), Bob Casey (D-PA), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Patty Murray (D-WA), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), John Warner (D-VA), Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), and Mark Kelly (D-AZ).

Text of the letter can be found below:

October 15, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra

Secretary

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

330 C Street, SW

Washington, D.C. 20416

Dear Secretary Becerra:

With passage of the continuing resolution, we write to urge the Department of Health and Human Services to release Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funds as quickly and at the highest level possible.

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.

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.

We look forward to continuing to work with you on this critical program, and thank you for your attention to our concerns and those of our constituents.

Sincerely,

An online version of this release is available [here](#).