



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS

M. JODI RELL  
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## **Governor Rell Hails New Federal Heating Assistance Funding**

*Governor Says State Will Not Let Safety Net Fail*

Governor M. Jodi Rell today thanked the Bush Administration for releasing nearly \$13.6 million in additional federal funding for Connecticut's low-income heating assistance program. However, the Governor said the program is still some \$10.7 million short of its projected need – a shortfall the state will cover if necessary.

"I will not allow this vital program to fall short, even if the federal government does not come through with the remainder of the money we need to provide sufficient benefits to Connecticut's most vulnerable residents," said Governor Rell, who joined other New England governors in writing President Bush on January 3 to urge more funding for energy assistance.

The Bush Administration today released a total of nearly \$450 million in Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding to the states, including \$13,598,024 for Connecticut. The announcement comes as another cold snap is moving into Connecticut, with highs on Sunday expected only in the 20s.

"Today's announcement is – without a doubt – good news for the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program," the Governor said. "Without it, people would be forced every day into agonizing decisions between food, medicine and warmth. Yet the Department of Social Services advised me earlier this week that CEAP faces a shortfall of about \$24.3 million. Even with today's federal funding there is a sizable gap that the state may be forced to step in and fill.

"In fact, with almost three months of cold weather left, we are already seeing a disturbing number of families exhausting all of their winter heating benefits – nearly 1,000 as of today," Governor Rell said. "DSS is estimating that as many as 20,000 eligible households could exhaust their benefits well before the winter is over. With oil still hovering around \$90 to \$100 a barrel, if this trend continues – and there is no reason to think it will not – a distressing number of people could be in real danger."

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DSS reported to Governor Rell that nearly 17,000 eligible households have already requested “crisis” winter heating aid – about twice as many as last January, when the figure was 8,700. Some 2,125 households have requested “safety net” aid, compared to only 98 last January. Crisis assistance is available after basic benefits are used up; households that still need help after receiving the crisis benefit may qualify for an additional “safety net” benefit.

DSS and the Office of Policy and Management are budgeting for increased safety net benefits of up to \$475, meaning that eligible households could receive more heating oil, propane or other deliverable fuel.

The record price of home heating oil is the cost driver. This January CEAP is paying about \$3 per gallon, compared to under \$2 per gallon last January. The result is that people are exhausting their winter heating benefits much sooner than usual.

“These record prices are causing many CEAP-eligible households to request crisis and safety net assistance much earlier than last year because the program’s purchasing power is substantially reduced,” DSS Commissioner Michael P. Starkowski said. “This year so far, \$5,736,800 has been committed for crisis assistance. Last year at the same time, \$2,670,000 had been committed. We expect that application activity will spike as household budgets are strained by significantly higher fuel prices.”

Connecticut originally estimated that this winter’s heating assistance program would cost \$62.9 million. However, the sharply higher cost of heating oil pushed that estimate to \$72.4 million.

Prior to Wednesday’s announcement, Connecticut had received \$48.1 million in federal LIHEAP funding. At this point, it is unclear how much, if any, additional federal aid may be released.

“It is not clear yet how much of this state funding will be definitely needed before the winter is over, but the trend lines require that we take action now to prepare for all eventualities,” Governor Rell said. “I know my colleagues in the General Assembly agree that we must step in to make sure our low-income families, elderly, people with disabilities and single adults are protected from the cold.”

### **Program information**

For information about the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program, families and individuals can visit [www.ct.gov/staywarm](http://www.ct.gov/staywarm) or call the Infoline at 2-1-1. Income and asset eligibility levels apply. The state’s 12 non-profit community action agencies receive applications from about 160 local sites and determine eligibility. The basic benefit level ranges up to \$675 for homeowners and renters whose heat is not included in the rent and up to \$270 for renters whose heat is included in the rent. Crisis and safety net benefits are also available, depending on need.