United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 18, 2011

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
United States Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is an indispensable lifeline for low-income households. As state agencies prepare their LIHEAP programs for the winter, we request that the Department of Health and Human Services release LIHEAP funds as quickly and at as high of a level as possible under the current continuing resolution.

Low-income families spend a higher proportion of their income on energy, and this is particularly true during times of extreme temperatures and increased energy prices. For many states, the beginning of October marks the start of the heating season, creating an additional constraint on household budgets. For example, the Energy Information Administration projects that the price of heating oil will be 10 percent higher this winter than last, the highest average winter price ever predicted. While these prices would be challenging under the best of times, elevated levels of unemployment across our states will make this year's heating season an even greater struggle. In addition, demand for LIHEAP has always been greater than the available funding, and the number of low-income households eligible for LIHEAP in 2012 is projected to remain at historic levels.

The President signed into law a continuing resolution that provides funding for federal programs through November 18, 2011. We recognize that this does not provide certainty about the ultimate funding level for the LIHEAP program for Fiscal Year 2012. It is critical, however, that the pertinent state agencies begin the process of determining the level of heating assistance for this winter. For this reason, we request that you release funds as quickly and at as high of a level as possible in order to allow states and low-income households to prepare for what will be a challenging winter.

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

Sincerely,

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Olympia Snowe
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Susan Collins
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Scott P. Brown
United States Senator

Kirsten E. Gillibrand
United States Senator

Jean Shaheen
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Jay Rockefeller
United States Senator

Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senator

Charles Schumer
United States Senator

Frank R. Lautenberg
United States Senator

Patty Murray
United States Senator

John F. Kerry
United States Senator

Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

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United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Chris Coons
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

United States Senator

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United States Senator

United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Jacob J. Lew, Director of Office of Management and Budget