July 6, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray, Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

On behalf of an increasing number of low-income families nationwide struggling to pay their energy bills during this unprecedented economic upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the American Gas Association, American Public Gas Association, American Public Power Association, Edison Electric Institute, National Energy & Fuels Institute, National Propane Gas Association, and National Rural Electric Cooperative Association urge you to fully fund the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) at $5.1 billion in the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies FY21 appropriations bill. Now more than ever, it is critical to provide a safety net for our most vulnerable American families.

LIHEAP is the bedrock of America's energy safety net, providing heating and cooling assistance to our most vulnerable, including the elderly, those with disabilities and suffering from chronic illnesses, and families with young children. Unfortunately, even in healthier economic circumstances, the need for LIHEAP has proven to be far greater than the federal resources provided to serve these vulnerable families. For example, in FY19, despite low unemployment, a strong economy, and stable utility prices, only one of every six LIHEAP eligible households were able to be served.

Now the situation is much more dire. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 47 million Americans have filed for unemployment. Sensing the growing need for home energy assistance, this past spring in the CARES Act, Congress wisely appropriated an additional $900 million above the FY20 funding level of $3.74 billion to address the crisis. Unfortunately, for many, economic circumstances continue to deteriorate, and now it is clear that this additional funding will only scratch the surface of what families will need to stay afloat. LIHEAP eligible households have climbed from 35.2 million to 43.8 million in just a matter of weeks.

Across the country, gas and electric companies have developed programs to protect their low-income customers, and states have instituted moratoriums to prevent utility disconnections. While these programs help customers manage their bills, they do not provide the comprehensive protections and access

to energy savings programs that the federal LIHEAP program provides. Further, state LIHEAP offices are reporting a substantial increase in requests for assistance, reflecting the need telegraphed in nationwide unemployment applications and severely stretching LIHEAP program capability.

Appropriating a fully authorized $5.1 billion for LIHEAP in FY21 will by no means solve America's energy poverty problem. However, with additional funding, the program can expand utility bill payment assistance to millions more Americans experiencing unemployment and other economic hardship in the coming months due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

American Gas Association
American Public Gas Association
American Public Power Association
Edison Electric Institute
National Energy & Fuels Institute
National Propane Gas Association
National Rural Electric Cooperative Association

cc: Members, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies