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Governor
Deval Patrick

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Governor Patrick Lauds \$11.5 Million In Federal Fuel Assistance For Massachusetts

BOSTON - Wednesday, September 17, 2008 - Governor Deval Patrick today applauded the announcement by the federal government that Massachusetts will receive \$11.5 million to help low-income residents heat their homes this winter, thanks to the release of emergency contingency funds by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

"This is a step in the right direction to help low-income seniors, families and individuals to stay safe and warm in their homes this winter," said Governor Patrick. "We will continue to work closely with our congressional delegation and urge Congress to fully fund the LIHEAP program."

Governor Patrick recently spoke with U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt to communicate the urgency of the need for fuel assistance within Massachusetts. Today's contingency release totaled approximately \$120.7 million nationwide, and Massachusetts received the second-highest amount in the country.

In July, Governor Patrick partnered with House Speaker Salvatore DiMasi and Senate President Therese Murray to launch a joint task force to address winter energy costs. The task force has already held public hearings in Springfield, Fall River, Haverhill, Worcester and Boston in the past few weeks. The group, chaired by state Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Ian Bowles, will submit at the end of September an action plan to help citizens cope with the high cost of energy expected this winter.

The recommendations will include a review of emergency service programs, as well as available programs to reduce home energy use through weatherization and efficiency improvements. Other areas of energy cost savings could include incentives for carpooling and use of public transportation. The task force will also explore ways to mobilize community, volunteer, and philanthropic resources to address service needs.

"I am pleased to see the federal government begin to show it realizes the very real energy crisis low- and even middle-income families in Massachusetts are facing this winter, but we must continue to work hard to convince the President and Congress that much more help will be needed," said Speaker DiMasi.

"I am encouraged by this announcement from the federal government," said Senate President Murray. "As we continue to find ways to bridge the gap in federal funding for LIHEAP, this money will help families and low-income citizens stay warm this winter."

Following a meeting of the New England Governors Conference hosted by Governor Patrick this summer, all six New England governors signed a letter calling on the federal government to increase Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program funds for the New England region. Yesterday, the New England Governors held a summit in Bar Harbor, Maine, and put forth a resolution urging Congress to fully fund LIHEAP for 2008 with an additional \$2.5 billion.

Last year, the Commonwealth received \$115 million in federal LIHEAP funding in addition to \$15 million in state funding to help to assist approximately 141,000 low-income Massachusetts residents heat their homes last winter. Nationwide, LIHEAP assists more than 4.6 million low-income Americans in paying their heating bills. Congress has not yet determined this year's final LIHEAP appropriation for its fiscal year, which begins on October 1. LIHEAP provides fuel assistance to low-income people with annual incomes up to 200% of the federal poverty level, or \$42,400 for a family of four.

For more information about LIHEAP assistance and other resources for winter heating help go to www.mass.gov/winterheating or call the HEATLINE at 1-800-632-8175. For information about how to deal with the high costs of gasoline, go to www.mass.gov/gastips.

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