

Northeast Regional Anti-Hunger Network

Connecticut Association for Human Services ▫ End Hunger Connecticut! ▫ Food Research and Action Center ▫ Hunger Action Network of New York State ▫ Hunger Solutions New York ▫ Preble Street Maine Hunger Initiative ▫ Project Bread–The Walk For Hunger ▫ Children’s HealthWatch ▫ Rhode Island Community Food Bank ▫ Southern New Hampshire Services, Inc. ▫ New Hampshire Kids Count ▫ University of Rhode Island–Feinstein Center for a Hunger Free America ▫ Hunger Free Vermont ▫ The Vermont Foodbank

December 18, 2014

As members of the Northeast Regional Anti-Hunger Network (NERAHN), a coalition of anti-hunger organizations in the seven-state Northeast region, we are writing to you to express serious concern about the impact on low-income households of the utility rate increases that are now taking effect across our area. The hardships brought on by these skyrocketing costs were highlighted in a recent [New York Times article](#) (‘Even before long winter begins energy bill send shivers in New England’); rate increases of [between 25 and 37 percent](#) are being implemented across the region. The higher utility costs will disproportionately affect those least able to absorb such drastic changes – namely low-income consumers.

The cost of utilities is directly connected to a family’s ability to adequately heat their homes and provide enough light and power for their safety and day-to-day needs. Moreover, increases in the cost of electricity or gas inevitably shrink the pool of money available for the family to meet other needs, such as food, housing, and health care. We know from research that [energy insecurity](#) (inability to access adequate home energy to meet household needs) is associated with food insecurity, and increased risk of young children being in fair or poor health, having developmental delays, and hospitalizations. In addition, it can destabilize families’ housing. [Seniors](#) are similarly vulnerable and are more likely to be in worse health and need more health care when utility costs rise.

There are two key programs that make a difference in this equation – the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). LIHEAP provides assistance in paying energy bills to low-income households; children in families who receive [LIHEAP](#) are more likely to have a healthier weight and less likely to be hospitalized when seeking care for an acute health issue than those who do not receive LIHEAP. Moreover their families are more likely to be stably housed. [SNAP](#) helps families to stretch their budget to afford enough, healthy food and much, much more – from sustaining childhood health and academic achievement to increasing women’s economic self-sufficiency to improving seniors’ mental health and nutritional status.

We ask you to help protect low-income households in each of your states by:

1. Supporting funding for LIHEAP - funding will likely need to be increased for our region to help alleviate the burden that these new rates place on low-income consumers
2. Ensuring that SNAP continues to be a strong and responsive ant-hunger program, and the important "Heat and Eat" policy is protected as an federal SNAP option for all states. Many of our neighbors in the region rely on SNAP benefits to help them make it through the month. Protecting SNAP and the state option to retain the connection between SNAP and LIHEAP ('Heat and Eat') is critical. The SNAP benefit calculation takes into account only a portion of a household's monthly shelter costs. The "Heat and Eat" option streamlines and coordinates benefits between SNAP and LIHEAP to ensure qualified families receive the maximum SNAP benefit for which they are eligible, helping them to stay both warm and fed.

Thank you for assistance in protecting our most vulnerable neighbors.

Sincerely,

Children's HealthWatch
Connecticut Association for Human Services
End Hunger CT!
Hunger Action Network of New York
Hunger Free Vermont
Hunger Solutions New York
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
New Hampshire Kids Count
Preble Street Maine Hunger Initiative
Project Bread – The Walk for Hunger
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