

# Murphy adds help for heating to bill

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U.S. Rep. Chris Murphy, D-5th District, called it “a victory for Connecticut’s home heating oil users.”

Gene Guilford, executive director of the 550-member companies Independent Connecticut Petroleum Dealers Association, said actions such as Murphy’s “will help more than 680,000 consumers, the environment, and the 13,000 people who work in our industry here in Connecticut.”

Guilford was referring to a provision the congressman inserted into a comprehensive energy bill during its consideration by the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Murphy’s provision would allow home heating oil users to participate in national energy efficiency and consumer rebate programs intended to cut emissions and save them money on heating bills.

“Here in Connecticut, we rely on home heating oil to stay warm in the winter,” Murphy said. “But it’s an expensive resource, and in tough times like these, that bill can force many people to choose between warmth, food, medications, or other necessities. My amendment will bring federal dollars to Connecticut to help more people in need.”

National energy efficiency and consumer rebate programs traditionally focus on use of natural gas and electricity. Including home heating oil users in the national energy efficiency and consumer rebate program will help more customers with their bills. Early estimates predict that in its first year, 2012, the program will generate between \$74 million and \$97 million to fund these initiatives in Connecticut.

The Connecticut Energy Assistance Program is administered by the Department of Social Services through community action agencies. One agency, New Opportunities Inc., which serves Waterbury and 21 towns including Meriden, Wallingford, Berlin and Southington, has taken in a total of 24,929 applications for assistance this year. This total represents an increase of 31.8 percent over last year’s program.

Edith Karsky, executive director of the Connecticut Association for Community Action, noted that community action agencies statewide have served more than 130,000 low- and moderate-income households this past heating season, an increase of more than 30 percent from the previous year. Some towns and cities have realized unprecedented requests for assistance — from a 41 percent increase in Danbury to a 50 percent increase in Stamford.

“We’re seeing people coming to our agencies for help who have never requested assistance before,” Karsky said. “Without the ongoing support from Congressman Murphy and the Connecticut Congressional delegation in securing additional funding [for the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program] many people in the state would have suffered even greater emotional, physical and financial stress this past winter.”

The energy bill, (HR2454) the American Clean Energy and Security Act, will provide funds for both state and federal programs to assist consumers with weatherization and energy efficiency improvements. Funding will be generated from sale of emissions permits purchased by polluters. Connecticut already participates in the system.

CT Senator John Fonfara said because of Murphy's efforts "some [emissions] credits will go toward softening the economic impact of rising energy costs [while] the legislation incentivizes significant improvements in how efficiently we all use the energy we consume." Fonfara has been an important legislative leader in the state on conservation and energy efficiency measures and works closely with the Community Action Agencies on the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP).

According to Guilford, the key to success is significant energy efficiency improvements.

"Connecticut is the only state to have enacted a fuel oil conservation fund that has, in just six months, documented a better than three-to-one savings for the low-income energy consumers served."

The clean energy and security act now moves on to the Senate for consideration.

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