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September 29, 2011

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to urge you to immediately amend your Fiscal Year 2012 budget proposal to fully fund the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) at a level of no less than \$5.1 billion.

Last February, when you proposed cutting LIHEAP in half based on projections of lower energy prices, you said "If it turns out that, once again, you see a huge energy spike, then we can revisit it."

When it became clear last May that those projections for lower energy prices were wrong, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius indicated that she would be willing to revisit the proposed LIHEAP cuts at a Congressional hearing.

Today, the Energy Information Administration is now predicting that the average price of heating oil will be higher this winter than it was during the price spike in 2008. If LIHEAP is not fully funded and is significantly cut at a time when heating oil prices soar, it will be a recipe for disaster in Vermont and other cold weather states.

The six governors from New England recently wrote that if LIHEAP funding is significantly cut, Vermont and the other states in our region "will be required to take drastic measures that will endanger the most vulnerable LIHEAP households."

Further, state LIHEAP directors have estimated that if LIHEAP is cut in half they would be left with few options but to cut millions of families from the program, including many senior citizens, persons with disabilities, and pre-school aged children. In the midst of the current recession, when poverty is increasing, that would be simply unacceptable and would lead to a severe winter health emergency.

In Vermont, it is projected that heating oil prices will be about 25 percent higher this winter compared to 2010. Experts have told my office that heating oil prices in Vermont could soon top \$4 a gallon. At a time when the average Vermont household uses 764

gallons of heating oil in the winter, cutting LIHEAP funding in half while oil prices soar would be devastating to tens of thousands of my constituents.

It is not uncommon for the temperature to get 20 below zero in the winter time in Vermont. Without adequate LIHEAP resources from the federal government, senior citizens on fixed incomes, families with children, and persons with disabilities will needlessly be put at risk. We cannot let that happen.

At a time when heating oil prices are projected to skyrocket, and when Vermonters and people throughout the country continue to struggle through the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, I would urge you to make it clear to Congress and the American people that LIHEAP must be fully funded at no less than \$5.1 billion. In the richest country on the face of the earth, senior citizens and children should not be going cold this winter.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to working with you on this issue.

Sincerely,



Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator