

[Bennington Banner](#)

Sure, we might have enjoyed several days of unusually warm temperature for this time of year, but make no mistake: Old Man Winter is right around the corner.

Which is why we were relieved to hear on Tuesday that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is releasing \$17.69 million in home heating assistance funding for Vermont.

Our congressional delegation -- Sens. Patrick Leahy and Bernie Sanders and Rep. Peter Welch -- had been calling for the release of these funds in addition to the continued support of the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (better known as LIHEAP). "Winter is already upon many Vermont families and heating fuel is not a luxury, it is a necessity," Sen. Leahy stated in a release. "Funding from the LIHEAP program helps many Vermonters get through long months of harshly cold days and nights. Without the assistance from this program, the winter would present a major threat to the health and lives of many of our friends and neighbors."

Indeed, the timing couldn't be better for this "vital lifeline for many Vermonters," as Rep. Welch put it. However, as he also points out: "This is just a down payment on what Vermont will need to meet the demand this winter."

While \$17.69 million is no small number, keep in mind it was part of a nationwide release of \$3.1 billion in LIHEAP funding. That \$3.1 billion is 90 percent of the block grant funding approved for LIHEAP under the Continuing Appropriations Act of 2013. The remaining 10 percent will be released later this winter. Also keep in mind that this LIHEAP funding has been cut by more than \$1.6 billion since 2010.

And with all this talk of Fiscal Cliffs and forced cuts, who knows what we'll be looking at down the road. Remember, this funding is aimed to help the most vulnerable among us. "In Vermont, the fuel assistance program is a lifeline to dignity for tens of thousands of senior citizens living on fixed incomes, families with young children, and persons with disabilities," Sen. Sanders stated in a release, while also pledging to fight to continue fully funding LIHEAP.

And while we're on the topic, we would be remiss to not offer a tip of the hat to Daryl Pillsbury and Richard Davis, who for eight years have been keeping those in need, locally, warm through their Windham County Heat Fund.

This year, the fund is looking to raise \$50,000 to help the more vulnerable people in our community stay warm this winter. Tax deductible donations can be sent to Richard Davis, 679 Weatherhead Hollow Road, Guilford, VT 05301 or you can donate directly at the Brattleboro Savings and Loan.

Vermonters seeking home heating assistance may visit the website of the Department of Children and Families at http://dcf.vermont.gov/esd/fuel_assistance .

As lawmakers in Washington continue to examine our nation's budget issues, we hope the importance of LIHEAP is not an overlooked afterthought.

In the meantime, we'll continue to watch the temperatures drop, and pray help continues to remain available. Certainly this won't be the last you'll hear on this topic this winter.