



**Testimony of Joshua Davis, SEVCA to the Joint Fiscal Committee
On Behalf of Vermont Community Action Partnership
October 16, 2025**

I'm Joshua Davis the Director of Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA), and am here today representing VCAP – Vermont Community Action Partnership. VCAP is made up of the 5 Community Action Agencies that cover the entire state.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the urgent situation facing Vermont households as a result of the federal government shutdown — specifically, the impact on LIHEAP (Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program).

We're here to ask you to immediately activate contingency plans to fund all three aspects of LIHEAP.

- **Ensure the release of seasonal fuel funds to allow Vermonters to get fuel delivered.**
- **Ensure CAPs can access funds to staff up immediately and distribute crisis fuel.**
- **Ensure Vermonters can access Emergency Heat funds for repair/replacement of broken heating systems.**

The programs supported by LIHEAP are not abstract line items; they are literal lifelines for thousands of Vermonters — many of whom are elderly, single, and living on very limited fixed incomes. These are people who have worked, contributed to their communities, and now, in retirement or disability, are simply trying to stay warm and safe through another Vermont winter.

How the Three LIHEAP Programs Work

When we talk about LIHEAP programs there are three different distinctions to make about how the funds flow into our communities. While they are distinct programs they are complementary and connected.

Seasonal Fuel Assistance helps households pay for heating costs.

- Funds are typically allocated directly to fuel dealers about one month from now (in mid-November), based on a complex formula that determines benefit levels — anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars per household.
- Those using wood or pellets receive their benefit directly, often in the summer when these fuels are sold at a lower cost.

Crisis Fuel Assistance is the companion program — it's what helps when the tank runs dry

- It runs from the last Monday in November through mid-April (or the last working day in April for metered fuels).
- A household must be in an actual heating crisis:
 - Tank at 25% or less,
 - A week's supply or less of wood/pellets,
 - Or a shut-off notice from a utility that provides heat or electricity for a furnace.



The **Emergency Heat Program** supports homeowners whose furnaces have stopped working — begins November 3 and shares the same income eligibility guidelines.

- This is an incredibly important program and one that SEVCA already has 8 households in the queue for when the program opens on November 3rd.
- I want to reiterate that it means that between now and November 3 they do not have a heat source. Which means they may be using electric plug in heaters and hopefully, lots of blankets and other means to keep warm.

Together, these programs form the backbone of Vermont's winter heating safety net.

Community Action Agencies' Role

Vermont's five Community Action Agencies (CAPs) — including SEVCA — are the front-line administrators of Crisis Fuel and Emergency Heat. At each Community Action Agency, staff:

- Screen applicants for eligibility and documentation,
- Coordinate with fuel dealers to schedule deliveries (typically 125 gallons per fill – which is typically the least amount of fuel dealers will deliver),
- Authorize payments and reconcile accounts,
- In this process we field hundreds of calls from anxious Vermonters seeking help.

Every one of those calls is a touchpoint with someone under immense stress — an elderly woman heating her home with the oven, a family living in one room in their house to save oil, a single adult deciding between prescriptions and a propane delivery.

This is high-volume, emotionally charged work that requires trained, compassionate staff. Most of us hire seasonal employees to handle the fuel season — *a process that should be happening right now*. The shutdown has thrown that preparation into uncertainty.

Impact on Vermonters

Earlier this week we got a call from an elderly woman in Townshend, living alone on \$1,000 a month fixed income. She budgets carefully — rent, medication, food — but is incredibly challenged to purchase a tank of oil — a \$500 fuel delivery is more than she can afford. Her thermostat stays at 60 degrees. She layers sweaters and blankets. We were able to connect her with the Windham County Heat Fund to provide support.

We use philanthropic dollars to help knit together support for requests that fall outside of the program year or for people who may not fit into the box of eligibility. Our goal right now is to support people to stretch until the program kicks in but if that program doesn't kick in until January or even later, we will have many that *will freeze*, literally.

Funding Picture and Contingencies

Seasonal Fuel should be available first for households, so that they can order the heating fuels they need. As mentioned above, this funding goes to fuel dealers or households directly. That funding should be available now, so people can get fuel delivered for the cold weather season.



Crisis Fuel is a backstop that is used when Seasonal Fuel is not enough. People will come to our Community Action Agencies for Crisis Fuel funding if Seasonal Fuel funds are not available. This approach will not be good for anyone, as crisis fuel is meant to be a stop-gap measure.

The Crisis Fuel program is funded at about \$2.3 million statewide, supporting benefits, staffing, and outreach — with the five CAPs collectively spending \$2.1 million last year.

SEVCA alone administers roughly \$240,000 in fuel assistance across Windham and Windsor counties — a small portion of the statewide pie, but with a massive local impact.

We've been told there may be state contingencies on the Seasonal Fuel and Crisis Fuel funds but as of this testimony we have not seen a plan. Without that, the timing mismatch is devastating:

- Vermonters are turning on heating systems now, especially as night-time temperatures are dropping.
- We need to be hiring staff and preparing to support people in need. It takes time to get ready for the demand that will be there.
- *Crisis fuel is not enough to meet the need but we do the best we can with what we have – but it is built on Seasonal Fuel assistance. We need to ensure that people will have the ability to start the winter with something in the tank.*

Broader Context

This crisis is not occurring in isolation. Households are already experiencing:

- Reduced 3SquaresVT (SNAP) benefits/Increased food insecurity.
- Rising costs for utilities, food, housing, and other basic needs.
- Lost work because of federal shutdown and other federal impacts or because of the overall economic outlook.

For Vermonters on fixed or low income, a small cut is proportionally huge. We're putting people in the position of having to make impossible choices – food over medicine, heat over needed car repairs – and you don't need me to tell you this is just the beginning of the impact.

Again, VCAP requests that you immediately activate contingency plans to fund all three aspects of LIHEAP.

- Ensure the release of seasonal fuel funds to allow Vermonters to get fuel delivered.
- Ensure CAPs can access funds to staff up immediately and distribute crisis fuel.
- Ensure Vermonters can access Emergency Heat funds for repair/replacement of broken heating systems.

Making funding available immediately will prevent avoidable suffering, maintain program integrity, and demonstrate to Vermonters that even amidst federal dysfunction, their state remains steadfast in its care. On behalf of the Vermont Community Action Network, I ask that you act swiftly to ensure continuity in these vital programs. Thank you for your attention to this important issue.