

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4501

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**148 MEMBERS SIGN ON TO SANDERS LETTER URGING PRESIDENT TO
RELEASE EMERGENCY LIHEAP HEATING ASSISTANCE FUNDS**

148 Members of Congress signed on to a letter drafted by Rep. Bernie Sanders and sent to President Clinton today urging the release of \$420 million in emergency Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funds. The lawmakers said immediate release of the funds is critical due to recent sky-rocketing energy costs.

Sanders said, "Low-income citizens across the country are finding themselves in crisis situations. The \$1 billion in LIHEAP funds currently available are 7 percent less than what was spent last year. On top of that, heating oil prices in the East and Midwest have been 23 percent higher than 1996 levels. And the cost of propane has risen 48 percent. Simply put, the available fuel assistance money is not enough to ensure that low-income families stay warm this winter. Without the emergency funds, many families won't be able to stay warm through the end of the month."

Sanders began circulating a letter to his colleagues in the House of Representatives in December to build support for the release of \$420 million in emergency funds. Congress appropriated \$300 million in emergency funds this year. An additional \$120 million was also left over from last year's emergency fund. So far, 148 Members, including 118 Democrats and 30 Republicans, have signed on to Sanders' letter to President Clinton.

Sanders said he is hopeful he will have the same success he had last winter in getting heating funds released. During the government shut-down and budget impasse, Sanders organized bi-partisan coalitions of over 140 House Members to sign his letters to the President and Republican leaders in support of LIHEAP. The result was the release of \$1.08 billion for the program nationwide, including \$180 million from the emergency fund.

In the letter to Clinton, the lawmakers stated, "The average LIHEAP family already spends 18 percent of its income on home energy costs, compared with 6.7 percent for all households. In many cases, asking families to pay more means asking them to choose between paying for fuel or paying for food, rent and other necessities.

"In the United States of America, low-income senior citizens and children should not be forced to go cold this winter. Your action last year in releasing emergency funds prevented such a crisis, and we appeal to you now to once again make certain that no Americans must go cold."

An estimated 5.2 million households, with incomes less than \$8,000, were served by the LIHEAP program last year, including 22,745 households in Vermont. At the end of December in Vermont, heating oil was selling for \$1.13 a gallon, compared to \$.91 last year. Currently, propane is selling for \$1.38 a gallon, compared to \$1.17 last year.