

Eliminating LIHEAP would be a cruel blow to Massachusetts families

By Carl Howell

At Community Teamwork, we serve thousands of households each year through programs that do more than help people survive — they help them thrive. Two of the most essential pillars in this work are the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG). That's why I feel compelled to speak out against the Trump Administration's proposal to completely eliminate funding for both programs in the coming federal budget.

Let me be clear: eliminating LIHEAP and CSBG would be devastating for families, seniors, and veterans across Greater Lowell and beyond. These programs aren't about handouts. They're about keeping people safe in their homes, offering stability when it's needed most, and ensuring no child or elder has to choose between heat and food in the dead of winter.

The proposed budget eliminates \$4.025 billion in LIHEAP funding and \$770 million in CSBG, slashing support to millions of Americans who rely on these services to stay warm, fed, and financially stable. For Massachusetts alone, more than \$135 million in energy assistance would vanish — funds that help over 200,000 households, including 13,500 individuals right here in our region assisted by Community Teamwork. More than 60% of those receiving assistance are over 60 years of age, 38% have a disability and close to 12% have a child 5 or younger.

The justification offered — that states already protect residents from utility shutoffs—is simply wrong and shows a deep misunderstanding of the reality in many communities. In Lowell and surrounding areas, many of our clients rely on delivered fuels like oil or propane. There are no shutoff protections for these fuels. Without LIHEAP, these families have nowhere to turn when the tank runs dry during a New England winter.

Beyond the moral implications, the economic fallout would be significant. LIHEAP dollars flow directly to local fuel vendors, HVAC contractors, and utility providers — creating and sustaining jobs in our region. In 2024, Community Teamwork distributed nearly \$9 million in LIHEAP funds, bolstering dozens of local businesses in the process. This program is as much an economic engine as it is a safety net.

In short, LIHEAP;

- Helps hard-working families afford essential heating and cooling services and is a proven, results-driven initiative
- Ensures energy security, prevents utility shutoffs and protects vulnerable households, including seniors, veterans and families with young children.
- Prevents costly energy-related emergencies, making it a fiscally responsible investment that reduces the need for emergency assistance programs.
- Ensures that businesses remain stable by making sure payments go directly to local utility companies, while keeping families focused on building financial independence.

Even more troubling, the administration has also fired the entire federal LIHEAP staff as part of its larger dismantling of the Department of Health and Human Services, compounding the chaos and confusion for states and local agencies.

Similarly, CSBG plays a critical role in helping us bridge the funding gaps that inevitably arise when supporting complex human needs. It provides close to \$600,000 annually to Community Teamwork to support vital programs such as our Community Resource Center located at 17 Kirk Street and the front door to all of our programs and services. The Resource Center provides thousands of families and individuals a holistic approach to meeting their needs each year. Without CSBG funding, our Resource Center goes away.

CSBG allows us to be responsive, flexible, and innovative. It helps us meet people where they are, whether they've hit a rough patch or are working toward long-term self-sufficiency. These are not "niche" services, as the administration claims — they are life-changing supports for people we all know: the retired veteran next door, the single mom at the bus stop, the neighbor recently laid off from work.

Our message to Congress is simple: do not let this happen. Support the programs that make a difference in real people's lives. The success of LIHEAP and CSBG is measured not just in statistics, but in stories—like the family who avoided eviction after a sudden job loss, or the senior who stayed safely in her home during a brutal winter.

We urge our community members, legislators, and fellow advocates to stand with us. The values of compassion, stability, and dignity are not partisan — they are American. And they deserve to be protected.

Carl Howell is the CEO of nonprofit Community Teamwork, Inc. in Lowell. Visit www.StandWithCommunities.org, to find out how you can help save these vital programs.