



Contact:

Joe Diamond  
Executive Director, MASSCAP  
617 357 6086 or [joediamond@masscap.org](mailto:joediamond@masscap.org)

Lisa Clay  
Communications/Member Services Manager, MASSCAP  
617 357 6086 or [lisaclay@masscap.org](mailto:lisaclay@masscap.org)

## **MASSCAP, Community Action Agencies Launches Annual Statewide Heating Help Awareness Campaign** *A Focus on Fuel Assistance and Weatherization*

**Boston, Mass. – October 30, 2018** – MASSCAP, along with Citizens for Citizens and the network of Community Action Agencies in Massachusetts, will launch its annual statewide awareness campaign on heating help including fuel assistance and energy efficiency programs in advance of the cold weather. The awareness campaign will include the placement of a number of billboards throughout the state highlighting the fact that low income families and individuals can receive home heating help. The website [heatinghelpMA.org](http://heatinghelpMA.org) (connected to the MASSCAP website) provides information for those in need of assistance.



*Fuel Assistance Awareness Billboard*

“We want to raise awareness of the energy and efficiency programs to make sure those who need assistance know how to access it. Winters in New England can be brutal and fuel assistance helps our vulnerable friends and neighbors avoid having to make excruciating decisions related to heating or food or clothes,” said Joe Diamond, MASSCAP’s executive director. “Fuel assistance helps to stabilize a household from an economic point of view, allowing people to focus on the kind of supports and training that lead to economic mobility.”

Fuel Assistance, or the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), is a federal program that helps low income households address energy costs. The program is administered in Massachusetts by a network of 22 community-based organizations, including 20 Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the City of Cambridge, and the New England Farm Workers Council. Together, up to 160,000 households each year are served. The Heating Help billboards will be in more than 70 locations around Massachusetts, beginning in November and lasting throughout the winter months.

“Warmth is not a luxury -- not in New England. It is a public health and safety issue,” said Birgitta S. Damon, President, MASSCAP, and Chief Executive Officer, Lynn Economic Opportunity (LEO). ”

When people are cold, they go to extreme measures to change that situation, often choosing between heat, food and medicine. Community Action Agencies are integral to connecting low-income families and individuals to the support they need. Home heating fuel assistance is a federal program administered by DCHD, the state Department of Housing and Community Development, in partnership with local agencies. Community Action Agencies know and understand the challenges faced by our clients. It is our responsibility to share that knowledge with decision-makers at all levels to encourage adequate investment to safeguard our communities."

The LIHEAP program is crucial not only to help pay for the rising cost of heat during cold New England winters, but also to ensure public safety and health throughout the region. Fuel Assistance recipients are also eligible for the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), a federal program that helps participating households stretch their fuel assistance dollars, and other energy efficiency programs.

"The Fuel Assistance program is a health and safety program as much as it is an income support program," said David Biltcliffe, Executive Director, Citizens for Citizens in Fall River. "When the families and individuals are able to stay warm, they are more likely to stay healthy. That is especially true for the elderly and the very young. It is important for everyone understand that this program assists many in our community including many working families that all face challenges with high housing costs, food insecurity due to high food costs as well as health insurance, child care, transportation and many other day-to-day expenses. Those who come to Citizens for Citizens, Inc. (CFC) for fuel assistance are also provided referrals and access to other programs and services provided through CFC, including weatherization, Head Start, Early Head Start, child care, SNAP, WIC, Food Pantry, Family Planning Health services. volunteer tax preparation as well as other community-based organizations."

The federal Energy Information Administration (EIA) recently projected that there will be a significant rise in the cost of home heating this year even if the temperatures remain the same as last year as predicted. EIA estimates, for instance, there will be 18% increase in fuel oil and 5% in natural gas. This increase combined with cold weather means on average heating bills will be \$269 higher.

The Massachusetts Association of Community Action's 23 private, non-profit human service and advocacy organizations work to administer key anti-poverty programs in every city and town in the Commonwealth. These organizations serve over 600,000 low-income people annually, more than half of them with incomes below 125% of the federal poverty level.

For more than 50 years, Community Action Agencies have been on the front lines of addressing poverty -- administering federal programs, federal community services and community development grants, and state funds. CAAs are economic engines in cities and towns across Massachusetts, providing communities with an annual infusion of over \$500 million in total resources. CAAs generate at least twice that amount helping clients become self-sufficient and productive.

//End

#### **About MASSCAP**

The Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP) is a statewide association of the 23 Community Action Agencies (CAAs) operating in Massachusetts. Through the combined skills and vision of its members, MASSCAP works to enhance the ability of each agency to better serve its clients. We work with the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development and other state agencies to open doors to self-sufficiency for low-income Massachusetts residents.

**About Community Action Agencies (CAAs)**

Community Action Agencies work to help our most vulnerable populations, especially the poor. Rooted in the communities we serve, we ensure that the basic needs of the poor and vulnerable are met. Our agencies provide basic social safety net services, including administration of services that help mothers and children afford nutritious food, assistance that prevents seniors from going cold in the winter, and centers that provide quality early child care to families. Last year, FY2017, CAAs helped more than 600,000 people in need.

We are also at the forefront of providing vulnerable populations with innovative services that help move individuals and families to economic independence. By employing thousands throughout the state, and by administering services whose funds create an important multiplier effect throughout communities, Community Action Agencies are important economic engines, especially in the Gateway cities of Massachusetts.