



Towards self-sufficiency...

NH Local Welfare Administrator's Association

c/o Cornerstone Association Management
53 Regional Drive, Suite 1
Concord, NH 03301

March 17, 2015

Senator Russell Prescott, Chair
Commerce Committee
New Hampshire Senate
107 North Main St.
Concord, NH 03301

Re: SB 100 Relative to Home Heating Fuel Deliveries in the Winter

Dear Honorable Senator Prescott,

The NH Local Welfare Administrator's Association would like to extend support for the passage of SB 100, the bill Relative to Home Heating Fuel Deliveries in the Winter. New Hampshire residents are always in need of the basic necessity of heat during the winter months. This bill would ensure that residents who have been determined to have financial hardship by Local Welfare Offices Assistance receive reasonable, yet critical delivery of the basic necessity of heat in the winter months.

Our Local Welfare Offices, through General Assistance, serve as the safety net for those unable to meet their basic needs such as rent, electric, medications, food and heating. General Assistance is funded solely by local property taxes. During the winter months, heating costs strain the normal budgets of residents, especially those on fixed incomes, such as the disabled who receive Social Security Disability Payments and the elderly who receive Social Security. Federally funded Low Income Heating Assistance Program (Fuel Assistance) also recognizes that home delivery fuels like oil, kerosene and propane cost residents more than electric and natural gas during the winter months and therefore provide more financial assistance. Unfortunately Fuel Assistance is not enough to cover all heating costs for needy residents.

Recently the NHMA completed an electronic survey of local Welfare Offices' experiences with assisting with unregulated home heating delivery fuels. Because there is no protection for residents when they cannot afford a delivery for heat, there were many heartbreaking stories statewide where the only heat is from home delivery fuels like propane, kerosene and oil. Local Welfare carefully determines need and eligibility for assistance, based on income, expenses and available resources. Despite all this, there is no requirement of a home fuel delivery company to accept the assistance of voucher payment for a minimum delivery to meet their emergency need and to ensure a reasonable timeframe for their delivery during the winter months.

In addition propane fuel has been a growing heat sources in the last 10 years. Welfare Offices do not have the option to use their own municipal heating accounts like oil and kerosene when these companies won't work with us. The tanks are owned by propane companies and to change companies would require immediate cooperation of the current propane company, which is often unmotivated to change the tank and will charge a fee to disconnect their tank. The new company will charge a deposit to bring in a new tank. This is not a workable solution, which means that we have no choice but to work with the current propane company. This situation creates a huge

and unreasonable expense for local tax payers. Propane is now in multi unit apartments just like natural gas or electric and companies have even asked for arrearages of previous tenants before they turn on the propane in the apartment.


Statewide local welfare offices have managed propane heating problems in many ways. Some offices avoid working with the propane companies altogether by suggesting to the residents to pay their propane bills and the Welfare Office will assist with other basic needs, including rent or mortgage. We spend a great deal of time seeking out alternative assistance programs, including churches that might help with the expected arrearage payments. Some offices do not have the time to seek out alternative sources of assistance and override their Municipal Guidelines to pay the expected extra funds for arrearages, deposits, emergency delivery fees, priming fee and the cost of their set minimum delivery.

Residents and local welfare offices do not experience these challenges when working with other heating sources such as electric and natural gas. They are regulated under the Public Utility Commission which requires those companies to not only accept current month's heat payment from assistance agencies during the winter months, but to allow residents to set up a reasonable repayment arrangement for any arrearage. Regulated heating companies restore heat service that day when a Social Service Agency commits to assist with the current month bill payment.

Our primary concern is that we have no official leverage to work with the home heating delivery companies to ensure that our neediest of residents have their heat restored in a reasonable time and at a reasonable cost to our local property tax payers who fund the local welfare assistance. Some propane and oil companies are reasonable and understand that we are working with them to help out their customers and they accept our minimum delivery payment and deliver that day without a special delivery charge. However, most companies have told us that they will not deliver until we guarantee payment of arrearages, deposit, cost of fuel delivered, special delivery charge and priming charge. Even when local welfare complies with all their demands and residents have no heat, we have still often experienced delays in delivery of home heating fuel for as long as a week in one case with a 3 day old infant in the household. The NH Attorney General's office has received numerous complaints regarding propane.

We support a healthy business and employment climate in New Hampshire. Many propane and oil companies are active in their communities. We would prefer unregulated fuel companies to reasonably work with local welfare offices toward the humanitarian goals of aiding their customers and our residents. However, it is clear more efforts are needed, including efforts of the state to provide reasonable safeguards to residents during the coldest months of the year in one of the coldest climates in our country.

Thank you for your consideration of the New Hampshire Local Welfare Administrator's Association's support for SB 100.

Sincerely,

Angela Martin-Giroux
Chair of Legislative Affairs Committee
NH Local Welfare Administrators Association