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February 27, 2006

The Honorable David L. Hobson
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Energy and Water
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Peter J. Visclosky
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Energy and Water
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Hobson and Ranking Member Visclosky;

Last year, Congress established an authorization level of \$500 million for the Weatherization Program for FY07 as part of the Energy Policy Act signed into law by the President. We would like to thank the Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee for its outstanding efforts in finding funds to meet this challenge in providing \$242.5 million for the Weatherization efforts of the states. This year, the authorization level is raised to \$600 million. Yet, in a complete reversal of the President's long standing commitment to the Program, the Administration has significantly reduced its 2007 request to \$164.2 million, or a 33 percent reduction.

We are writing to urge your Subcommittee to restore funding for the Low Income Weatherization Assistance Program to levels no less than the 2006 level of \$242.5 million for WAP and \$50 million for State Energy Programs (SEP) for FY07.

Weatherization is a clearly proven investment which has helped over 5.5 million families live in safer, more comfortable living conditions. The cuts proposed for this program reflect higher investments in research and development at the expense of poor families who cannot afford to maintain and heat their homes today. If the President's budget is upheld, 33,000 low-income families will be denied critical weatherization services. With this funding, these families would have saved an average of \$400 or more a year on energy. This money could have been used for essential needs such as food, clothing, and medicine. Instead, these low-income households will have to spend an additional \$198 million from their meager incomes to pay for energy that could have been saved if the homes were weatherized in 2007. At a time when oil and natural gas prices remain high and low-income families are facing huge increases in their energy costs, it is irresponsible for the Administration to place added burdens on these families by choosing not to help them conserve energy.

The State Energy Program (SEP) will have an immediate effect on reducing demand. SEP was authorized in the Energy Bill at a level of \$100 million and has a proven record of reducing energy consumption for residential consumers, as well as schools, hospitals, small businesses and agriculture. For every federal dollar invested in this program (\$44 million in FY'05), \$7 is saved in direct energy costs. Expanded loan and grant programs in addition to the existing activities could be implemented within the existing state structure.

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Year after year, the Weatherization Assistance Program reduces home heating bills by an average of over 30% and avoids millions of metric ton of carbon dioxide emissions annually, lessening the need for imported oil. Federal investment in WAP supports nearly 20,000 direct and indirect jobs within related industries, and creates 52 new jobs for every \$1 million of funds invested. Clearly, Weatherization Works, conserving fuel, and supporting the economy while reducing cases of homelessness and demand for public assistance.

Until now, the reliability of the WAP has attracted additional funding from a variety of sources including the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), utility public benefit funds, landlord contributions, state and local resources, and others. Should the funding for the Weatherization Assistance Program drop below the current level, the new capacity, equipment and workforce will no longer be fully utilized, discouraging private investment. These difficulties will be experienced nationwide. Indeed, there are nearly 20 million households still eligible for weatherization services, and most local agencies already have waiting lists that will take one to four years to complete. Without increased funding for the WAP, we will be unable to serve those who have waited so patiently for so long. It is in this spirit that we respectfully request \$242.5 million for Weatherization and \$50 million for SEP and continue support of our program until such time it can be fully funded. We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Connie Greer, Chair