

August 23, 2002

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Mr. President:

On August 8th, you directed the Department of Health and Human Services to release \$100 million in LIHEAP emergency funds for 33 states and the District of Columbia, citing the devastating impact that severe heat can have on children, the elderly, and the disabled. In carrying out your order to release these funds, your DHHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson stated that they were allocated to the states most affected by this summer's extreme heat, based on the severity of the heat wave and the number of low-income households in the state.

While I certainly agree that those states receiving funds as a result of your decision have legitimate needs to assist customers who have experienced severe heat this summer, astonishingly, the recent allocation was exactly zero (\$0) for Mississippi and all but three other states in the heat-belt South (NC, SC, and VA). As it becomes known, this omission is arousing great concern among the people of Mississippi, based upon comments I have received from citizens, the Mississippi Association of Community Action Agencies and its Community Action Agency members who provide low-income assistance services, and my state's electric and gas utilities. I am writing because I want to help them convey to you our reasons for asking you to revisit this issue and allocate some additional LIHEAP emergency funds to Mississippi and other Southern states.

You will know that we have made our case for additional LIHEAP assistance when you recognize that Mississippi is part of the region in the country where:

- Year after year poverty is most dire (Approximately 20 percent of the people in Mississippi -- live below the Federal Poverty Level);
- Summer cooling energy consumption and monthly household cooling bills are the highest and most onerous in the nation;
- Average summer temperatures in the Mississippi Delta states are much higher than those in the majority of Eastern and Midwestern states that received emergency allotments.
- Continuous high temperatures, high humidity, and recent public health warnings concerning the West Nile Disease epidemic in the South underscore the need for constant air conditioning in our region, especially for the elderly and sick.
- Housing conditions are the most substandard and inefficient;

- The unmet need for energy assistance is the most crushing (Many thousands of households in the South are still without natural gas service owing to their inability to pay utility arrearages that accrued during the harsh winter of 2000-01.);
- While record high temperatures have not been set in our state this year, summer is not over here – many of our hottest temperatures occur in August and September; and
- As you know, the economy is not producing the jobs it was a few years ago, and family incomes are very strained, especially on the working poor.

Finally, if, as Secretary Thompson says, the number of people in poverty is a critical factor in the emergency funds release, you cannot ignore the fact that our region has the highest poverty, but consistently receives the very least help from the regular LIHEAP appropriation. The appearance given by the omission of states in South is that there are no unmet needs for LIHEAP in the summer. That is simply untrue, particularly when one considers that the formula for distributing regular LIHEAP dollars to the states has been unfairly tilted against the South and other cooling regions for more than 20 years.

The plain fact is: LIHEAP's current regular appropriation is woefully inadequate to begin meeting the needs for energy assistance in every state. Given this unmet need, it follows that even with the release of \$100 million in emergency funding, not one of the 34 states got enough. **But no state – including Mississippi – deserved zero.**

Please exercise your authority to release at least an additional \$200 million in emergency funds and direct DHHS to distribute it so as to fairly allocate these LIHEAP dollars to all of the states.

Very truly yours,

RONNIE MUSGROVE