

House Republican Press Release

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\$40 MILLION IN FEDERAL HEATING ASSISTANCE AT RISK WITHOUT LEGISLATIVE ACTION



HARTFORD – Republican Lawmakers today said that more than \$40 million in federal heating oil assistance is in jeopardy if the state continues to allow those ineligible to participate in the program and they warned that Democrats may try to ignore the problem and instead enact meaningless changes to the state’s fuel assistance plan.

House Republican Leader Rep. Lawrence F. Cafero Jr., of Norwalk and Senate Republican Leader John McKinney of Fairfield both said that the Department of Social Services can require Community Action Agencies that administer the programs to request valid social security numbers from applicants. Non-verification of applicants and the use of phony social security numbers have spawned an FBI fraud investigation into New Haven’s CAA.

“We are legally obligated to comply with federal law and the Attorney General has laid out a clear course to verify eligible applicants,” Cafero said. “We cannot tolerate ongoing fraud and misuse of taxpayer dollars in these programs.”

Senate Republican Leader John McKinney of Fairfield said, “Ignoring federal law has consequences,” said Senator McKinney. “The continued improper administration of LIHEAP funds would set a dangerous precedent, leading to more fraud and a thinning of federal resources. Due to mismanagement and lack of legislative oversight, these funds are being granted to people ineligible to receive them at the expense of qualified citizens who need this assistance.”

Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, in an opinion provided to the state DSS, said that social security numbers can be used to verify income. Federal money can be provided only to those residing here legally, the Attorney General’s office said in a previous opinion.

“This issue is not about illegal immigration. It is about compliance with the federal statutes and failure to do so could jeopardize \$40 million in aid. If we lose that money, then everyone we try to help will be left out in the cold,” Cafero said. Cafero noted that federal authorities investigating the alleged have requested a videotape of a previous legislative hearing on the issue.

If the legislature fails to implement meaningful verification policies, then there can be no real anti-fraud measures put in place, the Republicans said.

The Republicans made their comments prior to a legislative hearing by members of three legislative oversight committees addressing the DSS fuel assistance plan.