

House Republican Press Release

September 26, 2007
Press Office: 860-240-8700

Rep. DelGobbo Joins Call for Audit of Agency Accused of OK'ing Energy Assistance for Illegal Immigrants



Allegations of Improprieties on Part of New Haven Community Action Agency too Serious to Ignore

The state Department of Social Services (DSS) should order an expanded forensic audit of the Community Action Agency (CAA) in New Haven that allegedly approved energy assistance funds for illegal immigrants, state Representative Kevin M. DelGobbo said today.

Representative DelGobbo, R-Naugatuck, also fought for the implementation of state policies that will prevent fraud and situations where illegal immigrants are provided state energy assistance. Representative DelGobbo sought to implement these new requirements during a legislative block grant hearing on Wednesday.

At a news conference Wednesday, state Senate Minority Leader Pro Tempore Len Fasano, R-North Haven, and State Representative Vincent Candelora, R-North Branford, called on DSS to order the audit into the CAA's administration of Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funds in the wake of whistleblower complaints that energy assistance payments were approved for illegal immigrants. Representative DelGobbo, who attended the news conference, strongly endorsed the call for the audit.

"With the winter heating season almost upon us, it is critical that an intensive audit of this agency's handling of federal energy assistance program funds get underway as soon as possible," said Representative DelGobbo, who serves on the state legislature's Energy and Technology Committee. "The evidence Representative Candelora and Senator Fasano have unearthed during their investigation and the whistleblower complaints they received are profoundly disturbing. An expanded forensic audit is the best way to determine whether the preliminary evidence of widespread mismanagement of energy assistance funds can be substantiated."

"There are thousands of needy Connecticut residents who qualify for this assistance every year. If CAA has been as sloppy in its administration of this program as the preliminary evidence indicates, it could mean that many Connecticut residents who are eligible for this assistance will receive less than they need to pay their energy bills because people who are in this country illegally are competing with them for it. A thorough forensic audit should not only determine the truth or falsity of the allegations, but also recommend new

safeguards to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely and that only those who are legally eligible for the benefits receive them.”

For the past several weeks, Senator Fasano and Representative Candelora have spoken with current and former CAA employees, and have reviewed volumes of documents relating to the agency’s handling of LIHEAP funds.

Senator Fasano and Representative Candelora said the information they have gathered raises serious questions about the lack of financial controls at CAA and the improper administration of energy assistance funds. The legislators have received a number of alarming whistleblower complaints about the creation of false Social Security numbers, questionable accounting practices, unqualified applicants receiving fuel assistance funds, and people who are receiving more than their statutory share of fuel assistance - all at the expense of taxpayers and other qualified families in need.

In their review, Senator Fasano and Representative Candelora also determined there were at least two applicants receiving LIHEAP who are ineligible to receive the benefit. They also found that incomplete applications were being approved and that there is a lack of asset verification by management before approving applications.

The legislators said the forensic audit should cover the last three years and include a review of all agency transactions, including: application process from intake to funding; vendor lists; contract payments; signatory on checks; oil deliveries; invoicing and related payments.

Additionally, the legislators called for:

- DSS to assign a veteran employee to review existing applications and ensure they are processed and funded according to state statute and federal law.
- DSS to demand the CAA Board of Directors to immediately require the two main administrators of the LIHEAP program be placed on an administrative leave of absence until further notice. There is evidence the two top administrators attempted to stifle employees when this matter became public. The administrators’ presence therefore would impair any effort to have an open and fair audit.

Creation of a CAA Board of Directors in accordance with Connecticut General Statute Section 17b-886.