

House Republican Press Release

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Rep. Hamzy: New Energy Assistance Package Makes More Middle Class Families Eligible for Aid



Republican Proposals Blocked by Majority Democrats would have Strengthened Energy Plan

More middle class Bristol and Plymouth families struggling financially because of unexpected increases in gasoline and electricity prices and sharp increases in the cost of home heating oil will be eligible for energy assistance under an energy assistance package adopted Friday by the Connecticut General Assembly, state Representative William A. Hamzy said today.

However, middle class families would have been better served if energy relief proposals offered by Republican legislators, which were blocked by the majority Democrats in the state House and Senate, had been included in the package, said Representative Hamzy, R-78th District, who voted for the energy assistance package that eventually was approved.

The GOP initiatives would have capped the wholesale price of gasoline subject to the state's Gross Receipts Tax at \$3.42 a gallon to prevent automatic increases in the tax when the price of gasoline goes up, enabled more middle class families to qualify for home heating assistance through the Operation Fuel program, and increased the electricity sales tax exemption for small businesses from \$150 to \$500 per month, Representative Hamzy said.

"Skyrocketing energy costs and the threat they pose to our economic future are a major concern for the people of Bristol and Plymouth, and rightly so," Representative Hamzy said. "Sharp increases in gasoline prices alone have forced middle class families in our towns to make drastic changes in their lifestyles. They are postponing major expenditures, foregoing out of state vacations and cutting back on entertainment expenses and restaurant meals. Now, with home heating oil prices double what they were last year and with electricity costs rising as well, many families could be facing serious hardship by mid-winter."

"If there ever was a time when the state needed to act decisively, it is now," Representative Hamzy said. "We needed to have emergency energy measures in place so that when winter sets in and families are faced with difficult choices, the resources will be there to ensure that no one will have to worry about being unable to keep their families warm. Although I believe the package we approved Friday would have better served middle class families in Bristol and Plymouth if our proposals had been adopted as well,

the final package does expand the number of people eligible for emergency assistance should they need it and I was pleased to vote for it.”

The energy assistance measures include:

- \$8.5 million for Operation Fuel to provide emergency assistance to households with incomes between 151% and 200% of the federal poverty level (\$31,800 to \$42,400 for a family of four).
- \$5 million for Operation Fuel to provide emergency assistance to households with incomes between 200% of the federal poverty level and 100% of the state media income (\$42,400 to \$93,821 for a family of four)
- \$6.5 million for grants to local and regional school districts to assist in heating public schools
- \$4 million to provide home heating assistance to residents 65 years of age and older
- \$3 million in additional funding for a rebate program for residential furnace/boiler replacement
- \$2 million for rebates to residents who repair or upgrade their existing furnace/boiler to achieve greater efficiencies
- \$2 million to the Energy Conservation Loan Program to provide additional loans for the program for efficiency improvements, alternative energy devices, and replacement furnaces and boilers. The legislation also sets a 0% interest rate for loans for natural gas furnaces or boilers that meet or exceed federal Energy Star standards and propane and oil furnaces and boilers that are at least 84% efficient, including those eligible for an existing rebate of up to \$ 500. It increases those eligible for the program from 150% to 200% of the state median income (up to \$187,642 for a family of four)
- \$2 million for a weatherization program for individuals who qualify for state heating assistance

For more information on who is eligible for state and federal energy assistance programs, please call the United Way of Connecticut's 2-1-1 information line for the location of the nearest agency to apply for the aid. Residents also can call the state's winter heating aid hotline at 800-842-1132 to learn about the current income and asset eligibility limits.