

THE ASSOCIATION OF THE BAR
OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL WELFARE LAW

Thanks for testifying
letting me know
last month!

October 31, 2005

Assemblymember Deborah Glick
Chair, Social Services Committee
47th Senate District Room 944 Legislative Office Building
Albany NY 12247

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Deborah
Dear Assemblymember Glick:

I write on behalf of the New York City Bar's Social Welfare Law Committee to urge you to sponsor legislation that would add an additional energy allowance to New York State's public assistance grant. The purpose of this energy allowance would be to partially offset increases in the cost of living caused by the dramatic spike in energy costs that are universally anticipated this Winter.

In September, Governor Pataki began a nine-point Strategic Energy Action Plan to help New Yorkers pay higher heating bills. In announcing his plan, the Governor acknowledged that, although the higher costs of fuel affect everyone, people with low-incomes are particularly hard hit because they have so little disposable income to adapt to an unexpected change in the economy. To offset the higher costs of heating oil, natural gas, and gasoline, the Governor is requesting that the Federal government increase funding to supplement benefits provided under the Federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP). Unfortunately such an increase will not begin to defray the higher heating bills many Upstate New Yorkers will face. Moreover, it will pay nothing toward the numerous increased costs that flow directly from spiking costs of fuel with which both Upstate and Downstate New Yorkers will inevitably have to contend.

When energy costs go up, it is not just heating bills that rise correspondingly. The cost of clothing increases because it is more expensive to transport goods from a factory to a retail store. The cost of food increases because it is more expensive to refrigerate perishable items. The cost of housing increases because landlords will pass along higher heating costs to tenants. New Yorkers surviving on public assistance in New York State simply will not be able to

adjust to such increases. A partial solution to this problem would be to add an additional energy allowance to the current basic welfare grant.

Such an increase is not without precedent. In the early 1980s, New York State was experiencing an energy crisis virtually identical to the one we now face. Then, as now, any significant rise in the cost of living disproportionately affected low-income communities. In order to protect some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers, the Legislature amended Social Services Law, section 131-a , by adding Chapter 102 of the Laws of 1981. This amendment provided public assistance recipients with a monthly Home Energy Allowance to be added to the welfare standard of need. Similarly in 1986, the welfare standard of need was again increased with a Supplemental Home Energy Allowance. Poor New Yorkers desperately need the Legislature to act again and provide an increase their cash grant.

Although reasonable minds may differ on whether Welfare Reform has been a success, one fact is beyond dispute. Those New Yorkers that remain on the welfare rolls are among the most vulnerable and in the most need of government assistance. I hope you will provide the leadership in this matter and sponsor a bill that would add an energy allowance to basic welfare grant

Thank you for your kind consideration of this very important matter. If either you or a member of your staff would like to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to call me at (646) 442-3554.

Very truly yours,



Robert F. Bacigalupi
Chair