United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 1, 2005

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

Hurricane Katrina upset the lives of millions, displacing families from their homes and inflicting severe economic damage. Without question, the people of the Gulf region deserve our support, and the nation, and Congress, stands ready to help. We fully support the current emergency supplement being considered. As the Administration works to put together a more comprehensive supplemental funding request to help millions of Americans endangered by Hurricane Katrina, we urge you to include $900 million in emergency Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funds. With this additional funding, the LIHEAP program will be able to provide the same level of purchasing power as last year. This funding is critical to avoid a looming, but preventable, crisis for millions of additional Americans caused by the soaring cost and diminishing affordability of home heating fuel as winter approaches.

The effects of Hurricane Katrina are being felt by Americans outside of the Gulf Region as gasoline, heating oil and natural gas prices rise in the wake of this disaster. Indeed, there is an imminent emergency confronting millions of Americans in cold weather states. The current rise in energy prices coupled with energy debt remaining from last winter are leading to increased disconnections and arrears among consumers as the winter heating season begins – threatening the well-being of low-income families and seniors. This situation warrants the provision of emergency LIHEAP funding in the supplemental request.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina's devastation in the Gulf region, Americans were facing record prices for oil, natural gas and propane. Hurricane Katrina damaged platforms and ports and curtailed production at refineries in the Gulf of Mexico, the source of almost a third of U.S. oil output. Crude oil for October delivery rose $1.50, to $68.70 a barrel on the New York Mercantile, and heating oil prices jumped by 10 cents. These increased prices will add significant costs to consumers for both gasoline and residential energy. The U.S. Energy Information Administration projected that retail home heating oil would increase to nearly $2.27 a gallon after taxes in December in the Northeast, an increase of nearly 21 percent from last December. Natural gas prices are also rising in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. States need additional funding immediately to help low-income families and seniors to ensure they can afford to heat their homes. States are bracing for potentially crisis conditions caused by the lack of affordable heating sources, particularly for seniors and the disabled.

Residents in Northeast and Midwest states face some of the Nation's highest energy burdens and cost-of-living expenses, placing serious financial burdens on low-income households. Almost daily, newspapers are reporting on the impacts of higher energy costs for consumers. Hurricane Katrina's impact on energy markets comes on top of soaring energy prices over the past several years.

Residents and business affected by Hurricane Katrina deserve the nation's full support and financial assistance, and we stand ready and willing to do everything we can to help. At the same time, we have a responsibility to prevent hardship for millions of other Americans by acting to provide LIHEAP emergency funds before we have another full-blown crisis on our hands. Thank you for your serious consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Jack Reed

Susan M. Collins

Charles E. Schumer

Olympia J. Snowe

Tom Harkin

Edward M. Kennedy

Patrick J. Leahy

Herb Kohl

Carl Levin

Jon S. Corzine

James M. Jeffords

Thomas R. Carper

John F. Kerry

Mark Dayton

Arlen Specter

Joseph I. Lieberman

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Christopher J. Dodd

Mike DeWine

Paul S. Sarbanes

Debbie Stabenow

Norm Coleman

Barbara Boxer

Dick Durbin