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News Release

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Waiting for OPM

Operation Fuel Needs To Start Energy Assistance Program Later

West Hartford, CT, November 17, 2009 – Operation Fuel will not be able to take applications for energy assistance this winter until at least January 4, 2010, Executive Director Patricia Wrice told a packed room of fuel bank directors and utility company representatives at Operations Fuel's statewide meeting Tuesday.

Normally Operation Fuel kicks off its emergency energy program on December 1, but it still does not have final approval from the office of policy management (OPM) for \$4,750,000 in state money that was allocated earlier this year by the Connecticut state legislature. Although Operation Fuel won't be able to accept applications until Jan. 4, Wrice said that people applying for energy assistance will be able to submit bills incurred after November 1, 2009.

"I just hope that we get OPM's authorization soon, otherwise I don't know what all of our families and senior citizens who depend on Operation Fuel are going to do if the weather turns cold and they don't have the money to pay their heating bills," said Wrice.

Although the costs for home heating oil and natural gas appear to have stabilized, Operation Fuel expects the need for emergency energy assistance to continue to increase this winter. Wrice recalled that while last season was the most challenging winter in Operation Fuel history, this upcoming year is projected to be just as difficult as Connecticut continues to face tough economic times.

During the upcoming legislative session, Operation Fuel is hoping to see a bill passed that will ask the Department of Public Utility Control to conduct a study on the feasibility of a discounted utility rate for low-income gas and electric customers. A similar bill never made it out of the state Senate when the legislative session ended this past June.

Connecticut is the only New England state without a discounted utility rate. States that have adopted such rates have seen their overall rate stabilize as their utility companies experienced a reduction in collection expenses, working capital expenses, and uncollectable debt, said Wrice.

Operation Fuel's goal is to raise at least \$1.7 million in private donations this winter.

Last winter, Operation Fuel -- a private, non-profit statewide program -- gave out about \$6 million in energy assistance to over 13,000 Connecticut households. Operation Fuel provides emergency energy assistance through its statewide network of more than 100 energy banks to lower-income working families, the elderly and disabled individuals who are in financial crisis and not eligible for, or have exhausted, government benefits. For more information on Operation Fuel, go to www.operationfuel.org. Individuals who need energy assistance should call 211 to obtain the name of their closest Operation Fuel energy bank.