



NATIONAL CONFERENCE of STATE LEGISLATURES

The Forum for America's Ideas

**“Heat and Eat” and SNAP Changes in the 2014 Farm Bill
(Agriculture Act of 2014 P.L. 113-79)**

By Tadeo Melean
4/16/2014

LIHEAP—The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), is a federal program that provides annual grants to states, tribes and territories to assist low-income households with home energy costs. Every state, the District of Columbia, and territories receive LIHEAP grants. Upon states’ discretion, LIHEAP funds may be used to assist in heating and cooling costs, crisis assistance, weatherization assistance and services to reduce the need for energy assistance. The latest data from HHS shows that in FY2008, 53 percent of LIHEAP funds paid for heating assistance, 3 percent for cooling, 19 percent for crisis assistance, 10 percent for weatherization, and the remaining 15 percent for counseling and administrative costs.

LIHEAP

In 2009, 7.4 million households received LIHEAP.

\$3.4 billion were appropriated for LIHEAP for FY2014.

“Heat and Eat”—“Heat and Eat” is a term used to describe a streamlining practice that 15 states and the District of Columbia use to determine Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit levels for eligible households. In calculating a household’s monthly SNAP benefits, certain deductions from income are allowed, including the “excess shelter deduction,” of which utility costs are a factor. A household may receive a higher SNAP benefit if the family qualifies for more deductions. States may use a “standard utility allowance” (SUA), an average of the state’s utility costs, instead of collecting an applicant’s utility bill. Under previous law, receipt of any amount of LIHEAP benefits could qualify a household for the SUA, increasing the likelihood that they would qualify for the “excess shelter deduction,” and therefore a higher SNAP benefit.



Changes to “Heat and Eat” in the Agriculture Act of 2014— Section 4006 of Title IV in the Agriculture Act of 2014, commonly known as the Farm Bill of 2014, provides that payments of \$20 per year or less no longer entitle a household to automatically qualify for the SUA. This means that families receiving \$20 or less in LIHEAP assistance will not qualify for “Heat and Eat.” These changes take effect on March 7, 2014 for new SNAP applicants. For current SNAP recipients, the law states that the changes will take effect when they reapply for benefits at the end of their current certification period. The act also allows states the option to delay implementation for up to five months until Aug. 7, 2014.

State Actions—According to a 2012 HHS survey, 15 states—California, Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin—and the District of Columbia practiced “Heat and Eat.” In addition, New Hampshire allowed an application for LIHEAP to qualify the household for the SUA. Since the enactment of the 2014 Agriculture Act reforms to “Heat and Eat,” eight states—Connecticut, Montana, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Massachusetts—and the District of Columbia have committed to increase LIHEAP payments to more than \$20 per year to come into compliance with the new law and ensure their constituents maintain eligibility for “Heat and Eat.” States are doing this by introducing bipartisan legislation that will increase LIHEAP payments to more than \$20, changing eligibility guidelines used by state agencies, and, if running low on federal LIHEAP funds, allocating state money to boost funds available for assistance.

NCSL Contacts and Resources

NCSL Hunger and Nutrition Website: www.ncsl.org/hunger

Ann Morse
Director of Hunger Partnership
NCSL—Washington, D.C.
(202) 624-8697
ann.morse@ncsl.org

Joy Johnson Wilson
Director of Health and Human Services Policy
NCSL—Washington, D.C.
(202) 624-8689
joy.wilson@ncsl.org

Gilberto Soria Mendoza
Policy Associate for Hunger Partnership
NCSL—Washington, D.C.
(202) 624-3576
gilberto.mendoza@ncsl.org

CRS. February 12, 2014. [The 2014 Farm Bill: Changing the Treatment of LIHEAP Receipt in the Calculation of SNAP Benefits](#)

CRS. February 7, 2014. [LIHEAP: Program and Funding](#)

Tadeo Melean is a Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow for the NCSL Hunger Partnership.