

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 16, 2006

CONTACT: Laura Capps/Melissa Wagoner
(202) 224-2633

**STATEMENT BY SENATOR KENNEDY ON REED-KENNEDY AMENDMENT TO
LIHEAP**

This winter low-income families have been struggling more than ever to make ends meet and keep their heat on during the cold winter months. In many places the need for heating assistance is still great.

Democrats pressed for months to increase funds for LIHEAP to the authorized level of \$5.1 billion. We urged the GOP leadership and the President to act, but the Republican majority blocked our efforts at every turn, and families payed a steep price for that neglect. The average LIHEAP grant has declined by almost 10 percent since 2002, and is now only \$288.

After months of fighting for full funding, the Senate added only \$1 billion to LIHEAP for 2006. This additional funding was essential, but no one should be under the illusion that we've provided adequate assistance to millions of struggling families around the country, many of whom are elderly and disabled.

Shamefully, the budget released by President Bush requests no increase at all in LIHEAP from this year's level. As a result, only \$1.78 billion will be available for next winter. The Administration continues to ignore the needs of our most vulnerable citizens so we must wage the same battle all over again.

Heating oil costs are not expected to go down next winter. Families will continue to be forced to choose between heat, food, health, and rent. We need to act now. Our failure to fully fund LIHEAP this winter left families shivering in the cold. We can't let that happen again.

I urge our colleagues to support our amendment. It's time to get this issue right for millions of hard-working low-income families.

###