

The Honorable Michael Leavitt
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201
FAX: (202) 690-7203

September 21, 2007

Dear Secretary Leavitt,

In mid-July the Society of St. Vincent de Paul participated in a delegation from Phoenix to members of the Arizona congressional delegation to advocate for a fair share of LIHEAP and other federal programs for the nation's fastest growing metropolitan area. Not all of the 140,000 persons moving to Arizona every year are financially secure. Over the past few years, the Society has spent an average of \$2 million annually in emergency rental and utility assistance to keep families safely in their homes.

Our friends at the Arizona Community Action Association tell us that LIHEAP funding for Arizona is adequate *for only 4% of those eligible* (families with incomes at 150% of the federal poverty level or less). Arizona agencies, cities and counties with access to LIHEAP are out of funds very early every month. Needy families turn to St. Vincent de Paul and other faith-based organizations as the source of last resort. Our funds come from f
Fifth-Sunday church collections and poor boxes.

As you may know, this summer has been one of unprecedented heat in the Valley with 30 plus days of 110 degrees or more. As a direct consequence, members of our 90 parish Conferences of Charity have been overwhelmed by increasing numbers of requests for utility assistance in significantly larger amounts. It was reported at our diocesan board meeting last Wednesday that requests for utility assistance in July broke all records and that requests in August were 50% above the July levels. Conferences in the Sun City area spent \$17,000 in utility assistance in one month alone.

Arizona's extreme heat is just as life-threatening as extreme cold. Unfortunately, the LIHEAP formula favors cold weather areas. The formula for LIHEAP allocation must be adjusted to reflect extreme heat as well as the percentage living at or below the poverty level.

We understand that there are still \$131 million in LIHEAP contingency funds available. We very much hope that some of these funds will be directed to Arizona.

Sincerely,

Stephen J. Jenkins
President, Diocesan Council

Frank Barrios
Diocesan Council Delegation Representative