

**GOVERNOR RENDELL SIGNS BILL MAKING STATE FUNDS
AVAILABLE TO HELP NEEDIEST PAY ENERGY, HEATING
COSTS THIS WINTER**

12/16/2005: PHILADELPHIA — Governor Edward G. Rendell today signed legislation designed to help keep Pennsylvania's seniors and its most vulnerable residents warm this winter in the face of rising fuel prices.

Governor Rendell signed legislation that he proposed in October as part of his comprehensive Stay Warm PA initiative. The Governor asked for up to \$15 million in state funds – a first for the commonwealth – to supplement the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

“This bill makes sure that we have the resources to protect our neediest residents since we have not been able to rely on the federal government for the energy assistance funding we need,” Governor Rendell said. “The need for help only continues to rise and we must be prepared to provide that assistance.”

“Our commitment is to make sure our most vulnerable citizens are warm and protected this winter,” the Governor added. “Government has to do its part to address this winter's energy crisis and with the support of the Legislature, Pennsylvania has taken action to provide the funds our residents will need to help heat their homes in coming months.”

In signing the bill outside the state office building at 1400 Spring Garden St. in Philadelphia, Governor Rendell was linked via telephone to five other locations -- Pittsburgh, Scranton, Bethlehem, Lancaster and Altoona – where seniors and representatives of local and community organizations who have participated in his statewide Stay Warm PA program, joined him for the signing. Various members of his cabinet and administration officials were on hand at each location.

House Bill 1539, after being amended by Rep. Camille “Bud” George (D-Clearfield), provides up to \$20 million in state funds to support LIHEAP, which is administered through the Department of Public Welfare. Governor Rendell thanked Rep. George and Sen. Vince Hughes (D-Philadelphia) and their colleagues for helping ensure passage of the legislation.

Governor Rendell has sought an increase in federal funds for LIHEAP, even while President Bush has sought a smaller appropriation.

The Governor said it is urgent for the president to increase LIHEAP funding.

Pennsylvania currently ranks second in the nation in the help it provides to help low-income families pay utility bills. The state, which does not currently match federal LIHEAP money, requires utility companies to pay \$212 million toward these costs. The Governor has called on the utility companies to increase their support and enrollment in the Consumer Assistance Program, or CAP.

“We continue to see great response to our Stay Warm PA effort from volunteers in communities across the state,” Governor Rendell said. “People have stepped up and jumped at the opportunity to help their neighbors. There will be many warm hearts helping to provide warm homes this winter.”

Governor Rendell's Stay Warm PA program includes:

- Seeking additional, federal LIHEAP money.
- Asking energy companies to help low-income consumers manage winter heating bills.
- Marshalling families and friends to help seniors take care of their homes to help lower energy costs.
- Ensuring that poor families have a second chance to make energy payments before utilities are turned off.
- Removing hurdles for poor families seeking to reconnect fuel service.
- Convening a statewide Stay Warm PA summit with volunteers and local organizations to protect the neediest citizens. And,
- Reducing the state's energy source.

As part of the Stay Warm PA initiative, the state has created a website, www.StayWarmPA.com, where residents can get information and find help in meeting their winter heating bills. Also, applications for LIHEAP assistance are available at county assistance offices, www.compass.state.pa.us, or by calling 1-866-857-7095.