



Project Stay Connected: Helping Families to Stay Connected to Their Gas & Electricity

NEUAC

Denver

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Why We Need to Do This Work...





“Rural U.S. Takes Worst Hit...

- ... as Gas Tops \$4 Average --- Some Pay 15% of Income” - NYT 6/9/08, p.1



Energy Prices Take Off (\$4.59/g.?!)





“But we don’t use heating oil....”

About 8% of all homes in U.S. use heating oil. 82% of those are in the Northeast.



“I’m having a gas attack...”

2008: \$12.12
2007: \$12.02
2006: \$12.94
2005: \$10.90
2004: \$ 9.71
2003: \$ 8.18
2002: \$ 7.38
2001: \$10.12
2000: \$ 6.37

Av. Natural Gas Price (Jan.)
\$/Mcf



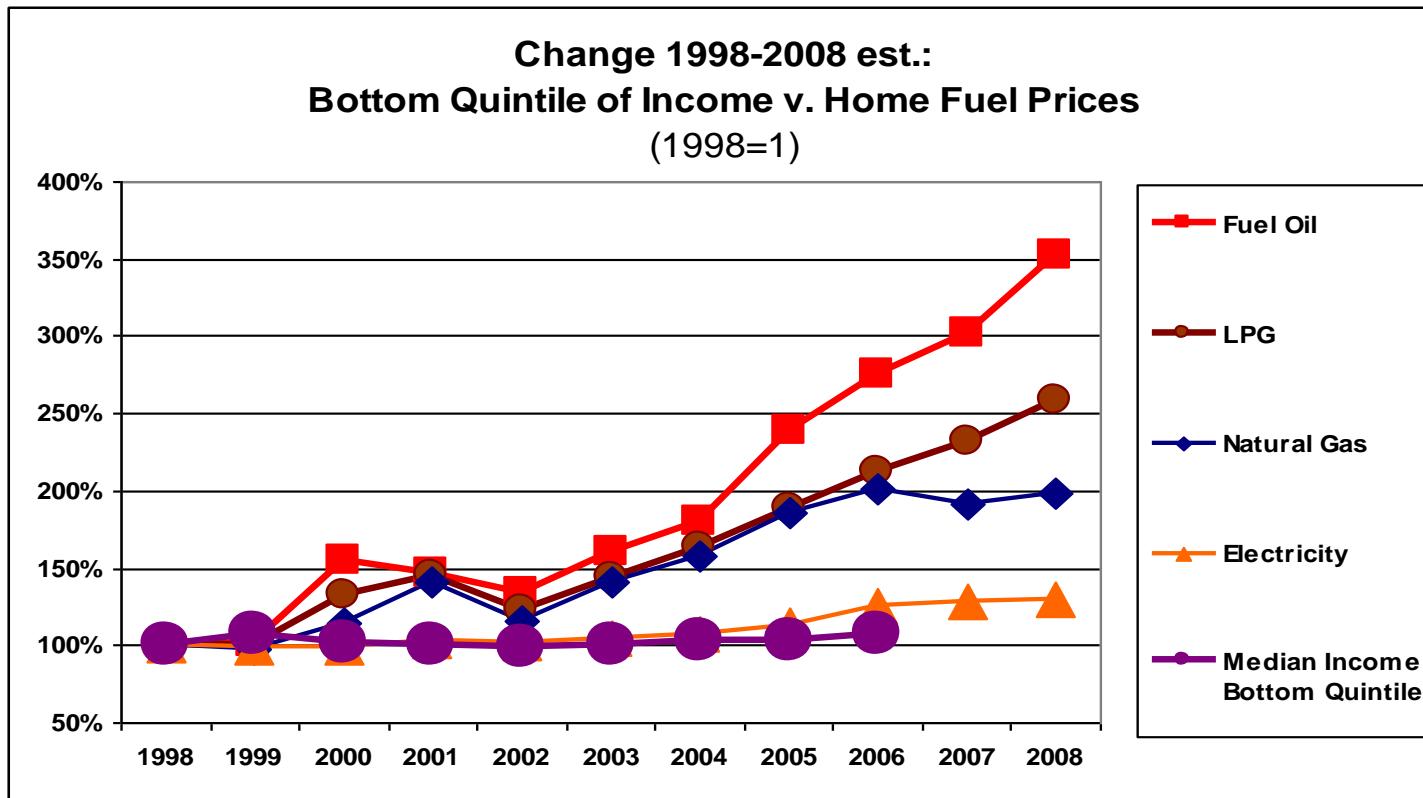
“Shocking news”

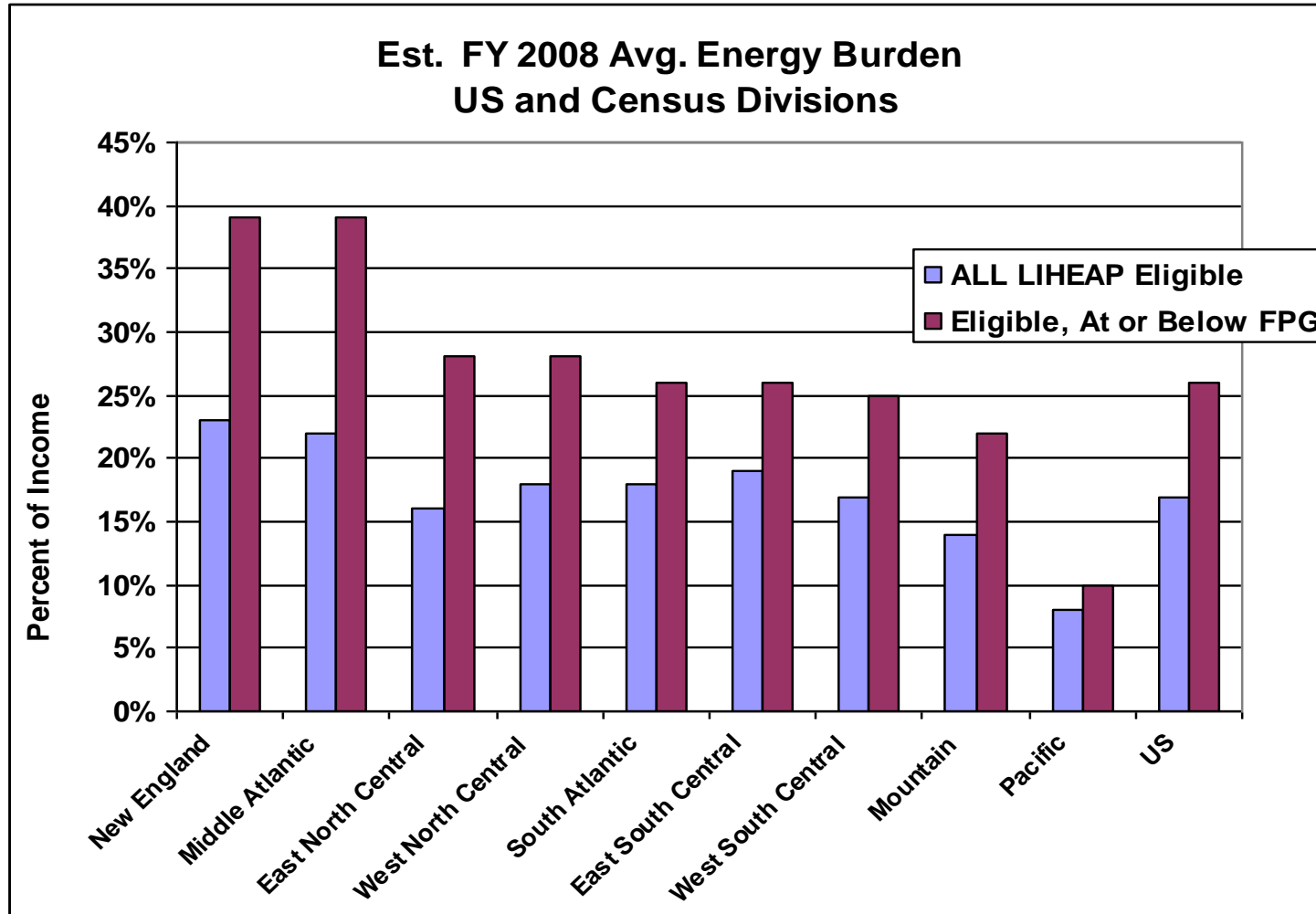
Electricity prices only up about 25%, 1996 to 2006 (nat’l av.)

Up 60% since 2000 (MA, more in other deregulated states).



Energy Burdens







Stay Connected - History

- 2004: MA Lt. Gov. concerned about nexus between unpaid utility bills & homelessness.
- Homeless forum panelist contacts NCLC.
- NCLC had small grant to work on utility training & advocacy.



Initial Steps

- NCLC (w. M. Lerner) develops “Util. Adv. for Low-income HHs” and launches trngs.
- Since distributed 2,000+ copies of book (now in 2nd printing); trained 1,500 front-line staff; built vibrant list serve/adv. network.
- Trainings “too short”; became 3-4 hrs.



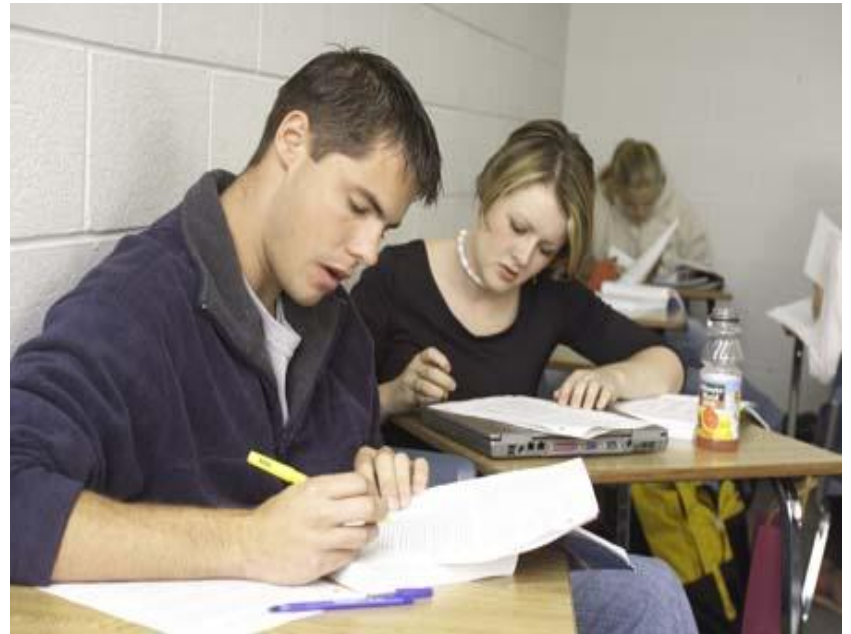
Who to Train

- Most successful trainees: front-line “generalists”
- DPH, DMH, DSS, DTA, churches, United Way, Salvation Army, hospitals, legal aid, LIHEAP, BAMSI, Travelers Aid, etc.
- Several groups request 2nd training.



A Word About Training...

Challenging!





Advocacy Efforts

- Auto-enrollment, discount rates added 80K
- Retro discounts
- Payment plan legislation
- Arrearage management legislation
- Auto-enrollment via DHCD?
- 25% down thru “vendor agreement”



Advocacy Efforts (2)

- MA LIHEAP funding: \$20 M, FY 06; \$15 M FY 08 (data collection key!)
- Addressing non-compliance w. “serious illness” rules
- Setting up better communications between LIHEAP agencies & credit/collection dep’ts



Ingredients for Success

- Lead person/agency that knows PUC rules, LIHEAP and other payment assistance and efficiency programs
- Existing funding for staff or access to fdn. or other new funding sources
- Good written materials
- Good relations w. key util./agency players



What Should the Goals Be?

- Consumer ed. around existing rules
- Changes to rules re: payment plans, term. time-frames, moratoria/protections.
- State LIHEAP funding, funding for utility efficiency programs.
- Building a network of trained advocates.
- Active list-serve.



Goals – cont'd

- Discount rates
- Arrearage management programs
- Vendor agreements



Examples From Around U.S.





The Hawkeye State

- Iowa: payment plans, IA Adm. Code 199-19.4(10) (p. 95 “Rights of Utility Consumers”)
- Plans must be “reasonable” (p. 96)
- 2nd plans can be LONGER than 1st
- Jerry McKim played key role.



The “Show Me” State

- MO winter moratorium rule, tit. 4, § 240-13.055: waived late pmt. fees, reduced pmt. needed to avoid disconnect. Upheld in MO Ct. App. (2006).
- AARP played key role



The Bay State

- MA vendor agreement: 25% down
- Serious illness, winter, elderly, infant: 220
CMR 25.03. Decent payment plan rules.
- \$35 M. in LIHEAP since 2005
- ~ \$30 M./yr. in util. en. eff. for L-I
- ~ \$50 M./yr. in L-I discounts



The Bay State - 2

- DPU 08-4: “Investigation into Expanding Assistance and Protections...
- Monthly collection reports
- AMPs



The Evergreen State

- Since 2001: \$86 M bill pmt. ass't, \$41 M en. eff.
- In 2000, no IOU had pmt. ass't; now, 4 of 5 do.



“Leveraging” w. LIHEAP, WAP

- In 31 of 44 states that have “leveraged” energy funds, CAPs/legal services played key role.
- 87% of all leveraged funds were in these states. Results: >\$2 B. in leveraged funds.
- In 5 states with no leveraged funds, lawyers were not present.



Some Lessons Learned

- “90% of life is just showing up” –Woody Allen
- “I found allies that I never thought I’d find, including utility people, regulators, and others. You’ve got to find the right people and work with them to make things better.”
- Elliott Jacobson



Lessons Learned - 2

- Potential allies include leg., util. cos., PUCs, press, other low-income groups
- Facts/data play a key role: arrearage and terminations esp. Document the need!



Need Advice?

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