

# **Despite Warm Weather, Many Families Are Struggling to Pay Energy Bills**

**By Patricia Wrice**

After experiencing one of the coldest winters in history, countless Connecticut households are still struggling to pay utility bills that resulted from the long chilly season.

Over the winter, some families and individuals supplemented their oil heat by using electric space heaters while others heated their homes with natural gas. Either way, financially vulnerable households didn't have to worry about their utility services being turned off during the winter as long as they were enrolled in the state of Connecticut's Winter Protection program.

But our state's winter protection program ended on May 1 and won't resume until Nov. 1!

Now utility customers, who fell too far behind on their gas and electric bills, are at risk of having their services terminated. Losing their electricity or gas service means no refrigeration to keep food cold, no hot water for bathing or washing dishes, no lights or electricity. These are basic necessities that we often take for granted.

As Connecticut's only statewide year-round energy assistance program, non-profit Operation Fuel will try to help as many struggling families and individuals as we possibly can. But our resources are limited and we must depend on the generosity of others.

Operation Fuel's Add-a-Dollar program is an easy way to help your financially vulnerable neighbors keep their lights and electricity on this spring and summer.

Utility customers can add a dollar when they pay their utility bill by check or online. Utility customers who wish to donate more than

one dollar or who want to contribute automatically each month to Operation Fuel should contact their utility company. The Add-a-Dollar program is part of Operation Fuel and all of the money collected is used to provide energy assistance for Connecticut households.

To learn more about Operation Fuel and the people we help, go to <http://www.operationfuel.org/>

**Patricia Wrice is Executive Director of Operation Fuel.** Operation Fuel is a private, nonprofit program that provides emergency energy assistance through its statewide network of fuel banks to lower-income working families and individuals, the elderly, and disabled individuals who are in financial crisis and not eligible for energy assistance from government-funded programs.