

OPERATION FUEL

Spring 2020

COVID-19: Calls Surge for Utility, Energy Help

Connecticut residents, like the rest of the world, are reeling from the massive economic fallout of COVID-19, and Operation Fuel is continuing to work furiously to provide emergency energy and utility assistance to households impacted by job loss, reduced income, and medical bills.

Requests for help have risen dramatically since mid-March. With our entire team working overtime either remotely or staggered in the office to meet the need, we have been able to respond to a large surge in calls for help – thanks to support from kind donors and funders.

Operation Fuel is helping cover the costs for deliverable fuel oil that is used by many households to heat hot water heaters and homes, along with providing assistance for customers who cannot afford their electric, water, natural gas, and other energy bills.

If you or anyone you know needs help, please call 2-1-1 to be connected with resources.

People who have never needed us before are desperately seeking our help. The husband whose surgery was delayed because of COVID-19 priorities at the hospital, leaving him unable to work and earn a full salary. The adult daughter who takes care of her parents in her home whose work hours were cut and only has enough money to pay the mortgage or the electric bill.

This crucial assistance is only possible because of support from donors like you. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts to all of you who are powering families during this unprecedented time.

If you find yourself in a financial position to help, you can give online at operationfuel.org or text **OPFUEL to 44321** to donate by mobile phone.



Operation Fuel's New Online Public Portal Extends Help Across State

Our priority is providing energy and utility assistance to residents all across Connecticut. To do so, we must make sure the application process is as accessible as possible for as many people as possible. We are thrilled to unveil our new Home Energy Assistance Application Program in July which allows residents to apply online, 24/7, from wherever they are. Stay tuned to Operation Fuel's social media for details!



1,540

households helped with utility bills and energy costs since March

\$609,733

distributed to families for emergency grants in only 10 weeks

“Thank you for all you do to help people with their energy needs, especially now during the COVID-19 pandemic. You're an important community resource.”

– Elaine, a donor from Shelton

Operation Fuel Board Elects 6 New Members

Our Board of Directors has elected six new members to contribute their expertise to our organization. Learn more about our new members at operationfuel.org/news. Welcome to the following::

- **Rauchell Beckford Anderson**, Rose Kallor, LLP
- **Alexandrea Isaac**, Starion Energy
- **Amy McLean Salls**, Arcadia Center
- **Nicholas Neeley**, Public Utilities Regulatory Authority, retired
- **Lisa Vallera**, Eversource Energy
- **Lorenzo Wyatt**, Home Comfort Practice

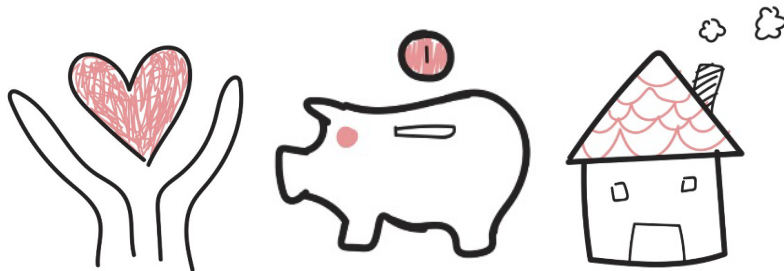
Thank you so much to our outgoing Board members for their service: Arianna Baret Peralta, Courtney Chan, and Camilla Hillian.



Travelers Championship: We Get 15% Bonus for Every Dollar You Give!

Though spectators won't be allowed on the course due to COVID-19, the 2020 Travelers Championship is happening June 25-28! And Operation Fuel has a win-win opportunity to earn bonus funds as a Birdies For Charity participant.

Any of our Operation Fuel donors who give through our Birdies For Charity link will get 15% of every dollar donated added to their donation. You can find more information and a link to donate at operationfuel.org/birdie



Why We Give ... Donor Testimonials

“ We are very happy and feel blessed to be able to share this contribution to support your wonderful efforts to help those in need in our local community.”

– All Your Friends at Westminster Presbyterian Church, West Hartford



“ Hope this donation will do a little to help others who otherwise would be cold this winter.”

– Heidi, Stillwater, NY



“ Your commitment to the needs of others has not gone unnoticed and we would like to make a charitable donation to support you in your efforts.”

– Tokio Marine HHC Charitable Giving Committee



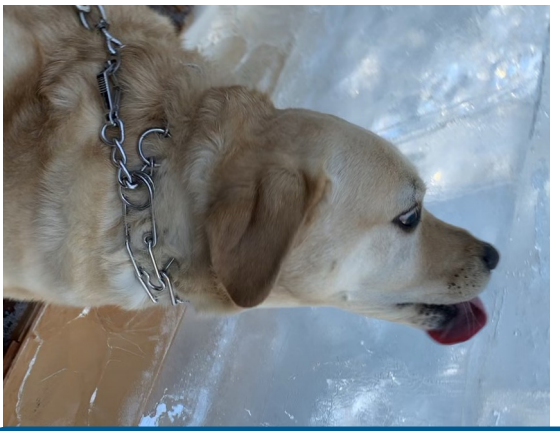
“ Because you do so much for others, I have made a small donation on behalf of the staff.”

– North Branford Intermediate School



Plug Into Operation Fuel on Your Social Media!





Grateful to our Ice House 2020 sponsors Eversource Energy, Starion Energy, iHeart Media, Connecticut Green Bank, United Illuminating, AARP-CT, Connecticut Power and Energy Society, Mazda of Manchester, and special guests CT Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz, Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin, and PURA Chair Marissa Paslick Gillett.



ICEHOUSECT

Thank you to our attendees and sponsors of the 2020 Operation Fuel Ice House presented by Eversource Energy! Our second annual event at the Old State House in Hartford in January raised \$98,000 and awareness for what it is like to live in a home without heat.

Funders, Foundations Filling the Gap with Surge of COVID-19 Help Requests

Thank you to recent funders who have helped us handle our surge in requests:

- Hartford Foundation for Public Giving COVID-19 Response Fund, \$150,000
- UIL Holdings Corporation Foundation and Avangrid Foundation, Inc., \$35,000
- Anonymous, \$25,000 (through Hartford Foundation for Public Giving)
- Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, \$20,000
- United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut, \$20,000
- Valley Community Foundation, \$20,000
- Connecticut Community Foundation-COVID-19 Response Fund, \$12,500
- Fairfield County's Community Foundation COVID-19 Fund, \$10,000
- Stanley D. and Hinda N. Fisher Fund, \$10,000
- Maximilian E. & Marion O. Hoffman Foundation, \$10,000
- Norma and Natale Sestero Fund, \$10,000
- William Caspar Graustein Memorial Trust Fund (COVID-19), \$10,000
- United Way of Naugatuck and Beacon Falls-COVID-19, \$8,100
- Beatrice Fox Auerbach Foundation-Zavela/ASK Fund, \$6,791
- Frank Loomis Palmer Fund, \$6,000
- Aetna Foundation, \$5,226
- Charles Nelson Robinson Fund, \$5,000
- Chelsea Groton Foundation COVID-19 Response Fund, \$5,000
- Connecticut Health Foundation, \$5,000
- Dominion Energy Foundation, \$5,000
- Ensworth Charitable Foundation, \$5,000
- Feldman Family Philanthropic Fund, \$5,000
- First Illinois AG Group (Vistra Energy), \$5,000
- Laura J. Niles Foundation, \$5,000
- People's United Bank Foundation, \$4,500
- Bruyette Family Foundation, \$3,000
- Energy Federation Foundation, \$2,500
- Kristian & Nancy Jensen Charitable Fund, \$2,500
- Windsor Federal Savings Bank, \$2,500
- The Hartford - Windsor Community and Giving Committee, \$1,500
- Barnes Group Foundation, \$1,000
- McCormack Foundation, \$1,000

Pandemic Further Clouds Water Affordability Issues

Even before COVID-19 came along, Emily's family budget was so tight that they took showers at a local gym instead of at home so they could lower their monthly water bill.

Emily discovered it actually cost her less to haul the family laundry to a laundromat rather than run the washing machine at home, which also raised their water bill. Both of Emily's cost-saving methods were time-consuming and had their challenges, but they kept water costs low so the family could stay in budget.

Then, due to coronavirus, non-essential businesses in Connecticut were closed for health and safety reasons, including the gym and laundromat the family had been using. With handwashing and hygiene suddenly more important than ever, Emily's water bill skyrocketed far outside their ability to pay. Desperate, Emily joined thousands of others seeking water assistance.

Olivia and her family were on a similarly strict budget pre-coronavirus. To cut costs, she analyzed her family's shower and laundry usage, calculated those costs, and set a limit on how many showers and loads of laundry could happen to stay in budget.

Her budget was barely balanced, but the bills were being paid. Then COVID-19 struck, and her husband, an essential worker, suddenly needed to sanitize his work clothes every day in the washer when he got home from work. Their kids were home all day, every day and needed to use much more water. All of Olivia's meticulous budgetary planning went out the window, and she, too, found herself seeking help.

Budgets, in the best of times, are stretched impossibly thin for too many. Juggling too little income versus too many bills, people have to make painful choices every month: do I spend our limited money on food or medicine? Rent or utilities? During our 43-year history of providing emergency utility and energy assistance to low- and moderate-income households in Connecticut, we at Operation Fuel have seen, time and again, that any unexpected cost can send a household spiraling toward financial crisis.

These problems existed long before COVID-19, but the pandemic has shined a spotlight on what is now glaringly obvious: people can't afford the ever-rising costs of utility bills.

Water and wastewater services have become increasingly unaffordable. While Connecticut ranks among the highest in the nation for quality drinking water, federal grant funds that have historically been available to subsidize infrastructure improvements have largely been eliminated. The challenge water utilities face is meeting strict environmental standards at the state and federal level and responding to the needs of their most vulnerable customers.

A crucial part of Operation Fuel's mission is to advocate on behalf of the families we serve, and we have extended that advocacy to include water affordability, engaging with experts in the water management and utility fields to learn more about how water policy impacts our clients. We also work with state policy makers to bring more awareness to the problem.

It is very encouraging to see the proactive steps that many of our water utilities in Connecticut are taking by partnering with Operation Fuel so we can provide direct bill payment assistance. In 2018, Operation Fuel and the Metropolitan District Commission piloted a water assistance program to help lower-income MDC customers. In 2019, Operation Fuel provided over \$63,000 in water utility assistance grants to 171 households that were facing termination of service.

This year, we created a partnership with Aquarion Water Company and Connecticut Water to assist low-income consumers with their water bills, and we are in negotiations with additional companies to further expand our reach.

Partnerships like these are critical to addressing water affordability because Operation Fuel has the experience and capacity to provide statewide assistance whereas water utilities may not have experience with addressing affordability issues. MDC, for example, attempted an assistance program on its own but realized that it could be better administered by Operation Fuel.

"To have Operation Fuel come in was a god-send," said R. Bartley Halloran, counsel for MDC. "They prevented shutoffs. No one wants that."

We can't be certain how long we will see the financial fallout from COVID-19, We do know that people who have never needed help before, like Emily and Olivia, are reaching out to us in record numbers. Operation Fuel looks forward to working together with utilities and energy providers to use our combined **#PowerForGood**.

