
Submitted to the New York State Joint Housing Budget Hearing

February 23, 2026

Chair Krueger, Chair Pretlow, and Members of the Legislature:

My name is Renee Hungerford, and I am the CEO/Executive Director of Community Action of Orleans and Genesee (CAOG), the Weatherization provider serving Orleans and Genesee Counties. We appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the FY 2026 Housing Budget.

CAOG strongly supports the joint testimony submitted by NYSWDA, the Association for Energy Affordability, and NYSCAA. We write to reinforce the urgent need to **restore and protect funding for the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) in the Fiscal Year 2027 Budget.**

About the Weatherization Assistance Program

For decades, a majority of Weatherization in New York State has been funded through the consistent federal-state framework in which 10% of Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) funds are allocated to the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP). This allocation is not discretionary; it is critical to the State's ability to deliver permanent, energy-related cost savings (and health & safety) measures to the homes of the local low-income families in our community. For our agency, the diversion of these funds represents a 60 percent reduction in available resources, fundamentally undermining our ability to sustain operations and deliver essential weatherization services.

What Weatherization Means in Our Community

Weatherization is a federally authorized program that reduces energy costs for low-income households by improving home energy efficiency, ensuring safe heating systems, and addressing health and safety hazards.

Last year, our Weatherization team:

- Served 55 households.
- Leveraged \$725,000 in federal and state funding.
- Employed 8 staff.
- Served residents in the districts of 139 Assembly 62nd Senate.

For many of the households we serve, energy costs consume a disproportionate share of income. Weatherization provides permanent bill reduction, improves housing quality, and stabilizes vulnerable families. Weatherization programs like ours directly reduce the amount of energy used in a home. These energy efficiency improvements are valuable to low income families that are struggling to survive. Not only are we making homes more energy efficient, but we are also making them safer! Draft reduction, carbon monoxide testing and overall indoor air

one of the many customers whose life changed from this program.

We received a call from “Cheryl” back in 2024. “Cheryl” was looking for some assistance for weatherization on her house and lived in a town that is in our service area. In 2024, we had over a year waiting list in Orleans County. Finally, when Cheryl’s name came up on the list, we were able to qualify Cheryl for the program. Cheryl, seemed to have the worst luck, every appointment that was scheduled, something came up. Several deaths in Cheryl’s family prolonged the weatherization process, but, we finally made it to Cheryl’s house for the energy audit! Cheryl’s house needed help! Cheryl is a single female on a limited income, Cheryl tried multiple times to have work done on the house. Contractors started work, were paid, then disappeared, leaving work unfinished, and leaving Cheryl frustrated and now finding her project list growing. Our energy auditor arrived at the house, where he was able to create a plan to make Cheryl’s house warmer and safer. During the work, Cheryl, noticed a difference immediately! Her upstairs is usually closed off for the winter to keep heat downstairs where she spends most of her time. The third day, the guys told me that the staircase to the upstairs was not blocked anymore. By the 4th day, it was very warm in the house and Cheryl made a comment about turning the thermostat down. On the 5th and final day, Cheryl was and is one of the happiest clients we have ever worked for. She contacted me thanking everyone in the program for respecting her and her home. She commented that without Community Action’s Weatherization Program, she does not know if she would have made it through the winter.

The Impact of HEAP Funding Loss

Without the HEAP Funding designated to WAP, our weatherization program will become unsustainable. It will force us to:

- Lay off our highly trained building science professionals.
- Disrupt our contractor networks built over decades.
- Increase energy burden for our low-income residents.
- Greatly reduce the number of families we serve.
- Consider ending the essential federally mandated Weatherization Assistance Program services we provide in our area.
- We already have a waitlist of 200 families in need of weatherization services. We cannot let these families down and allow them to suffer in our cold climate with unaffordable heating costs.

409 East State Street
Albion, NY 14411
Phone: 585.589.5605
Fax: 585.589.9015



5073 Clinton Street Road
Batavia, NY 14020
Phone: 585.343.7798
Fax: 585.343.4063

This funding represents the majority of our annual operating capacity. Cuts would not be temporary — they would dismantle infrastructure that has taken decades for us to build.

We respectfully urge the Legislature to:

- Restore and protect the 10 percent HEAP Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) allocation through Social Services Law § 97(5) in the Fiscal Year 2027 Budget.

Weatherization is one of the most cost-effective housing stabilization tools available. It permanently lowers utility costs, reduces delinquencies, prevents displacement, and strengthens communities across New York. For our organization, this translates into measurable, lasting affordability improvements for the households we serve—reducing crisis interventions and helping families, people with disabilities, and seniors remain safely in their homes.

We respectfully urge restoration of the 10 percent HEAP weatherization set-aside in the final FY 2026–27 State Budget. Thank you for your consideration and continued leadership on housing stability and affordability.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Renee M. Hungerford".

Renee M. Hungerford
Executive Director/CEO
Rhungerford@caoginc.org
585 590-5265