



Joint Council for Economic Opportunity
of Clinton and Franklin Counties, Inc.

Testimony of Joint Council for Economic Opportunity of Clinton & Franklin Counties, Inc. (JCEO)

Submitted to the New York State Joint Housing Budget Hearing
Wednesday, February 25, 2026

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

My name is Laurel Polttila, and I am the Director of the Weatherization Assistance Program at the Joint Council for Economic Opportunity of Clinton and Franklin Counties, Inc. (JCEO). We provide Weatherization services to families across Clinton and Franklin Counties, and I appreciate the opportunity to share our perspective on the FY 2027 Housing Budget.

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

About the Weatherization Assistance Program

For decades, Weatherization in New York has depended on a reliable federal, state framework, with 10 % of Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) funds dedicated to WAP. This funding is not optional; it's the foundation that allows the State to deliver lasting energy savings, safe heating systems, and essential health and safety improvements to the homes of local low, income families.

For our agency, diverting these funds would be devastating. It would drastically reduce the resources we rely on to operate and deliver essential services. Reducing WAP doesn't just hurt weatherization programs; it weakens the entire LIHEAP budget. Without weatherization, families continue to live in inefficient homes, facing higher energy costs. That means more LIHEAP dollars must go toward heating and electricity bills instead of lasting improvements. Cutting WAP is a short-term "fix" that ends up costing the State more over time, while investing in WAP is a proven, cost, saving strategy that strengthens LIHEAP, protects families, and makes every public dollar go further.

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What Weatherization Means in Our Community

Weatherization is more than an energy program; it is a lifeline for families in our community. By improving home energy efficiency, ensuring safe heating systems, and addressing critical health and safety hazards, Weatherization directly eases financial and physical burdens on households. In Clinton and Franklin Counties alone, our program helps hundreds of families every year, keeping children warm, seniors safe, and homes healthy. Across the state, WAP strengthens communities by delivering tangible energy savings, supporting local jobs, and ensuring our neighbors can live with dignity and security.

Last year, our agency:

- Served approximately 160 households, including 80 LIHEAP recipients, impacting roughly 220 children and 250 adults, a total of about 470 people.
- Leveraged approximately \$793,547 in federal and state funding through our WAP allocation for Program Year 2025.
- Employed 12 dedicated staff and contractors in Weatherization. These are hardworking, blue-collar professionals who enter the field with foundational skills and education and grow into highly trained building science specialists through hands-on experience, certifications, and ongoing training.
- Served residents in **Assembly Districts 114 and 115, and Senate District 45**, covering communities like Plattsburgh, Malone, Saranac Lake, Champlain, and surrounding towns.

One of the families we served had young children and was struggling to keep their home warm after their primary heating system failed. With no other option, they were relying on unvented space heaters in the children's bedrooms, raising serious safety concerns and leaving the family worried about both comfort and risk. Through the Weatherization Assistance Program, we were able to replace the heating system and upgrade insulation throughout the home. The result was immediate: the home now maintains safe, consistent heat in every room, eliminating the need for space heaters in the children's bedrooms and dramatically reducing safety hazards. The family noticed that their home was warmer and more comfortable overall, including rooms that had previously been difficult to heat. They were deeply appreciative of the North Country

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friendly familiarity of our crew and the lasting impact these improvements have had on their daily lives, comfort, and sense of security.

For many families, energy costs take up an unfair share of income, forcing difficult choices between heat, food, medicine, and other necessities. In Northern New York, where winters are long and severe, this burden is even more pronounced. Families in our area pay more simply because they live in older, drafty homes. Weatherization permanently lowers energy bills, improves housing quality, and stabilizes households, giving families safety, security, and peace of mind.

The Impact of HEAP Funding Loss

Without the HEAP funding for WAP, our program would become unsustainable. It would force us to:

- Lay off highly trained staff
- Disrupt long, standing contractor networks
- Increase energy burdens for low, income households
- Reduce the number of families we serve
- Potentially end the federally mandated Weatherization services we provide

Cuts to WAP mean more LIHEAP funds would be spent year after year simply to cover fuel and electricity, rather than investing in long, term solutions that permanently reduce costs. This funding is the backbone of our operations. Losing it wouldn't be temporary; it would dismantle decades of infrastructure built in this region.

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 FY 2027 Budget.

Weatherization is one of the most cost-effective tools to stabilize housing. It permanently lowers utility costs, prevents displacement, reduces arrears, and strengthens communities. For JCEO, it means measurable, lasting improvements in affordability for the households we serve, helping families, seniors, and people with disabilities remain safely in their homes.

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We respectfully urge the restoration of the 10 percent HEAP WAP set, aside in the final FY 2027 State Budget. Thank you for your consideration and your continued leadership on housing stability and affordability.

Respectfully submitted,

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