

Greater Eastport Ecumenical Churches Association, Inc.
137 County Road, P.O. Box 147
Eastport, Maine 04631

17 November 2022

Governor Janet T. Mills
1 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Governor Mills,

We are facing a human tragedy in Washington and Hancock Counties which, though preventable, is threatening the lives of thousands of vulnerable people this winter.

I am writing to you of the inability of Down East Community Partners, DECP, to register sufficiently the poorest of our citizens for the federal Low Income Heating Assistance Program, known as HEAP.

In a recent article, the Bangor Daily News reported that residents of Aroostook County are able to apply for these funds beginning in mid-July—BDN online, November 15, 2022, “Mainers Will Get Less Heating Aid This Winter,” by Lori Valigra. Here in Eastern Maine, the application process, administered by DECP, only begins after Labor Day. A limited number of staff is now scheduling appointments for the end of March to evaluate the paperwork of applicants sorely in need of help with staggering home heating costs *now*. This means that those applying now for HEAP assistance will not receive anything in their fuel tanks until April 2023 at the earliest. This is unconscionable.

As a Board member of the Great Eastport Ecumenical Churches Association, we administer a small Community Emergency Heating Fund to assist those in immediate need with a one-time gift of 100 gallons of fuel or the equivalent. Last year we provided assistance to 36 households. This year, with our current resources, we have enough for twenty families.

Why, oh why, should this tragedy be unfolding in our midst? DECP have only enough staff to process 40 or so applications a day, while those who are applying for assistance now are waiting for four to five months for much needed federally approved fuel to be delivered to them.

As the Governor of the State of Maine, what can you do to bring this Maine non-profit agency to implement a just and reasonable accommodation to the needs of people in our State. **SOMETHING MUST BE DONE.** Please do whatever you can **IMMEDIATELY**. The lives of our most vulnerable citizens are at stake.

With great thanks for addressing this,

Colin Windhorst, Board Member, GEECA Inc.