NEWS

"Dreaming through Tokyo skies / I wanted to see the world"
KYOTO PHEOBE BRIDGERS

DeLauro forecasts rise in state heating bills due to Iran war

BY EVELYN RONAN
STAFF REPORTER

Connecticut is in for a staggering increase in home heating bills this winter — mostly due to President Trump's "misguided war of choice" with Iran, Rep. Rosa DeLauro said in a Tuesday morning press conference about rising energy costs and oil scarcity.

DeLauro cited a new report from the National Energy Assistance Directors Association, which predicted that the cost of home heating oil will jump by 31 percent this winter, with electric heating costs set to rise by 9 percent and natural gas by 6 percent.

"Connecticut commuters have already paid an estimated $22 million more at the pump since July, and now that same shock is coming for home heating oil bills," DeLauro said.

The increases in energy bills partly stem from the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a central oil chokepoint that the Iranian government has effectively blocked in retaliation for the U.S.-Israeli airstrikes that started in February. The blockage has netted a U.S. energy supply deficit, causing a spike in prices at the pump.

Connecticut's Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, a federal grant program the Trump administration threatened to eliminate in April, has a budget of over $94 million for the winter season. But DeLauro said that figure lags far behind what the state needs to compensate for energy price hikes linked to the war.

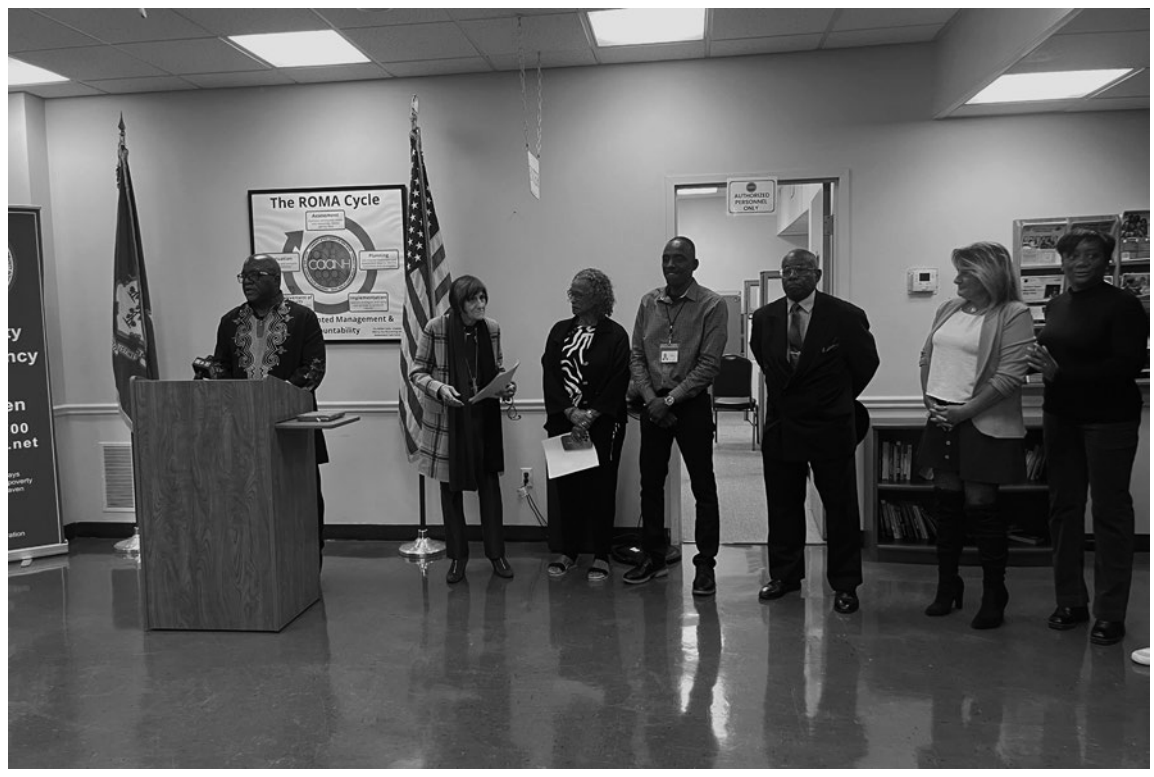
10,000 additional low-income families are expected to apply for LIHEAP energy subsidies this year, state social services commissioner Andrea Barton Reeves said at the press conference.

"People that you thought were secure are not anymore," state representative Toni Walker said, adding that a large proportion of applicants for energy assistance are seniors, people with disabilities and households with children under six.

The vast majority of applicants that qualify for home heating oil subsidies are already out of fuel, said Gannon Long, the chief policy and program officer at Generation Power CT, a nonprofit that provides emergency home energy assistance.

At the press conference, Long urged the state legislature to bridge the political aisle and convene for a special session to address rising energy costs.

Generation Fuel provides up to $500 in home fuel delivery assistance per family. Long said that even in the onset of the colder months, the grant is not enough.



EVELYN RONAN / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
At a Tuesday press conference, state officials criticized President Donald Trump's war in Iran and called for more federal energy assistance as they forecasted a rise in home heating costs this winter, in addition to the already high oil prices.

"Almost everyone who has applied this year is already or almost out of fuel," Long said, adding that prices will only worsen as winter rolls in.

Connecticut households with an annual income below 60 percent of the state median income qualify for energy assistance through LIHEAP.

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Investigator's link to police overseers in limbo after stalemate

BY EVELYN RONAN
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In July, the New Haven Civilian Review Board, a third-party organization that investigates civilian complaints of police misconduct, voted to pause sending complaints to a private investigator after police officers refused to answer the investigator's questions.

Two months later, the review board's chair said she had not heard from the investigator, Kia Roberts, and that it was unclear whether Roberts had decided to cut ties entirely with the board.

In March, the board hired Roberts, a New York-based private investigator, to look further into two alleged instances of police misconduct. According to the board's chair, AnneMarie Rivera-Berrios, Roberts reached out to the New Haven Police Department that month to question a group of officers about the complaints. Rivera-Berrios said officers refrained from coordinating with Roberts and were advised to not answer any questions, citing stipulations in the police union's collective bargaining agreement.

Florencio Cotto, president of the New Haven Police Union, did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

The review board stopped sending Roberts cases to investigate in July, Rivera-Berrios said in a phone interview. The police union's refusal to cooperate rendered the investigator a "waste of money," Rivera-Berrios said, adding she thought there was no point in continuing to contract with her.

The board's chair said she has not heard from Roberts and is unsure "if she just decided to take a step back or cut ties." Rivera-Berrios said the board continues to work closely with the police department and the city's lawyers.

Roberts did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Letter to city alleged 'noncooperation'

In June, Roberts sent a letter on behalf of the board to Mayor Justin Elicker and the city's corporation counsel. She alleged that she and Catherine Lamar, a city attorney who represents the board, had attempted to negotiate with the police union to facilitate questioning and faced a standstill.

"I have more than 15 years of conducting sensitive misconduct investigations including work for Fortune 500 companies, government agencies, professional sports organizations, and other high-profile entities." Roberts wrote in the letter. "I have never encountered the level of resistance, obstruction, and noncooperation that we are currently experiencing from NHPD."

The officers cited the police union's collective bargaining agreement — not police department policy — in their decision not to comply with the investigator's requests.

Lenny Speiller, a spokesperson for Elicker, wrote in an email that the city's corporation counsel and the counsel for the police union are "actively working" to accommodate all parties "in an effort to provide the Civilian Review Board with information necessary for the Board to meet its mandate."

"The email that Attorney Roberts sent to Mayor Elicker and other parties was forwarded to the Office of Corporation Counsel," Speiller wrote, referring to the June letter. "The Office of Corporation Counsel has been in touch with Attorney Roberts several times on this matter, and offered to facilitate efforts to provide Attorney Roberts with the information she has requested at an in-person meeting, and that offer still stands."

A spokesperson for NHPD could not immediately be reached for comment regarding the contents of the letter.

Roberts, on behalf of the board, alleged that the officers' refusal to answer her questions violates a city ordinance which permits the board to question officers based on witness testimony. The law also prevents the chief of police from making an independent decision on a civilian complaint until he receives the board's recommended course of action.

"Internal Affairs investigations are being closed before our independent reviews have been completed, creating significant concerns about how these processes are intended to operate together," Roberts wrote in the letter.

Fair Haven Alder and Civilian Review Board member Frank Redente said in a phone interview that the board's process should have considered the contents of the police union's collective bargaining agreement and "can't expect officers to breach their own contract." At a July board meeting, Redente requested the city pause its contract with Roberts until the blockage could be resolved.

The board is continuing to review cases and make recommendations to the police department's Internal Affairs unit, Rivera-Berrios said.

The New Haven Civilian Review Board was established in 2019 after a unanimous vote by the Board of Alders.

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ADRIAN KULESZA
The New Haven Civilian Review Board hired a private investigator to look into alleged police misconduct, but officers refused to respond, citing their union's bargaining agreement.