



EXHIBIT 8
DATE 1-25-05
HB 332

January 25, 2005

TO: Chair Rep. Rosalee Buzzas and members of the House Appropriations Committee

FROM: Claudia Clifford, Advocacy Consultant, AARP Montana

Re: Support of HB 332

Madame Chair and members of the committee, for the record I am Claudia Clifford, advocacy consultant for AARP Montana. AARP has 143,000 members in Montana and over 35 million nationwide.

AARP Montana has been involved in advocacy for reliable, affordable energy especially for low and fixed income Montanans for 5 years. Last February we hosted the first Energy Summit for Consumer Advocates in Montana. Two of the key discoveries of that summit were:

- The changes in energy burden in households coupled with significant increases in prescription drug/healthcare burdens demand that we look at a comparable statewide program to meet needs that will continue for some years (a national energy economist estimated Montana low and fixed income households spend about 32% of monthly income on energy bills, and 34% on out of pocket healthcare and Rx bills).
- DPHHS estimated there were 80,000 households eligible for LIEAP, but only 25,000 to 30,000 households were enrolled in the program. Within the Department there exists a dilemma between wanting to enroll more people and the reality of not having enough money to provide meaningful assistance.

AARP Montana's recent Membership Survey (December 2004) found that 43% of our surveyed members find it difficult to pay their energy bills. Strengthening energy assistance was one of their top three legislative priorities.

Due to the dramatic need for more energy assistance, we are pleased to support this supplemental appropriation. We prioritize funding to low-income bill assistance and weatherization projects given the great need right now. AARP will continue to do intensive outreach and education in all our events statewide to promote all the varied and dispersed assistance programs. Our brochure for this season is attached. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this high priority for AARP.