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Operation Fuel and Partners Address Water Affordability Issue

Hartford, Conn., December 5, 2018 -- Water affordability has become a critical concern for many Connecticut households. Today, Operation Fuel held a news conference at the State Capitol to bring more awareness to the water affordability problem that is affecting many lower-income households.

After the news conference, there was a roundtable discussion that included House Majority Leader Matthew Ritter; State Senator-Elect Matthew Lesser; Bart Halloran, The Metropolitan District (MDC) Counsel; David Silverstone, MDC Consumer Advocate; Richard Sobolewski, Office of Consumer Counsel; Brenda Watson, Operation Fuel; Jack Betkoski III, Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA); Lori Mathieu, Department of Public Health; and Betsy Gara, Connecticut Waterworks Association.

Panelists examined the challenges that lower-income and vulnerable families and individuals are encountering with water utility expenses. Many of these households are also struggling with the increasing costs of other basic necessities such as food, electricity, and home heating.

Water and wastewater services are becoming unaffordable for many households as expenses continue to increase in order for Connecticut's water utility companies to be able to provide quality drinking water. Federal grant funds, which previously were available to subsidize infrastructure improvements, have been eliminated. Meanwhile, water utilities must meet strict environmental standards at the state and federal level, while responding to the needs of their most vulnerable customers.

"We hope today's roundtable discussion provided a forum to begin developing ways to help lower-income customers who are struggling to pay for water and other basic needs. Partnerships, such as these, are critical to addressing the water affordability issue," pointed out Watson.

In April, Operation Fuel and the MDC formed a partnership by piloting a water assistance program to help lower-income MDC customers that are in danger of having their water service terminated. Since the program began, thanks to funding from MDC, Operation Fuel has provided nearly \$44,000 in water utility assistance grants to 111 households that were struggling to pay their water bills and were facing termination of service. The MDC and Operation Fuel will continue to partner on the water assistance program in 2019.

Operation Fuel provides year-round emergency energy assistance throughout Connecticut to lower-income working families and individuals, the elderly, and disabled individuals who are in a financial crisis. Anyone who needs energy assistance should call 211. For more information on Operation Fuel, or to make a donation, go to www.operationfuel.org.