



Senate Fiscal Agency
P. O. Box 30036
Lansing, Michigan 48909-7536



Telephone: (517) 373-5383
Fax: (517) 373-1986
TDD: (517) 373-0543

House Bill 4649 (Substitute H-1 as passed by the House)
Sponsor: Representative Kenneth Horn
House Committee: Energy and Technology
Senate Committee: Energy Policy and Public Utilities

Date Completed: 4-2-09

CONTENT

The bill would amend the Michigan Low Income Heating Assistance and Shut-Off Protection Act to revise a requirement that the Department of Human Services (DHS) make information concerning public assistance recipients available to public utilities; and allow disclosure for the purpose of programs intended to prevent or delay utility disconnection.

The Act creates a low income heating assistance and shut-off protection program, requires the DHS to administer it, and specifies various responsibilities of the Department.

Subject to restrictions prescribed by Federal regulations governing Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, rules of the DHS, or otherwise, for preventing the disclosure of confidential information to any person not authorized by law to receive it, the DHS is required to make available to a public utility regulated by the Public Service Commission (PSC) information concerning public assistance applicants and recipients, if the disclosure is necessary and use of the information is strictly limited to the purpose of the utility's administering a program created by statute or PSC order and intended to assist public assistance applicants or recipients with defraying their energy costs.

Under the bill, the DHS would have to make this information available on a monthly basis to an energy provider, notwithstanding the provisions of the Social Welfare Act, and subject to current restrictions for preventing the disclosure of confidential information to an unauthorized person. The information would have to be made available for the purpose of a provider's administering a program intended to assist public assistance applicants or recipients with defraying their energy costs or preventing or delaying utility disconnection.

The Act also requires the DHS to authorize use of weatherization resources among the dwellings of all assisted households in the State, giving first priority to those that exceed the annual consumption cap. The bill would delete this requirement.

The bill also would delete requirements that, by the beginning of the third year of the program, the DHS promulgate rules to create an energy conservation incentive that provides direct financial benefits to assisted households that reduce their use of heating energy, as well as implement a billing system by which any difference between an assisted household's monthly heating bills and its heating allotments and supplemental payments will be billed directly to the DHS and paid to the provider utility, up to the annual consumption cap.

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on State or local government.

Fiscal Analyst: David Fosdick

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.