
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO ENERGY ASSISTANCE.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that Hawaii's electricity
2 rates are among the highest in the nation, at close to three
3 times the national average, and vary based on availability of
4 renewable resources, power plants, fuel costs, and pricing
5 regulations. The 2024 report commissioned by the Aloha United
6 Way, "ALICE in Hawaii: 2024 Facts and Figures", states that two
7 in five households, or forty per cent, in the State live below
8 the ALICE (asset limited, income constrained, employed)
9 threshold, meaning that almost half of all families in Hawaii
10 are struggling to make ends meet, even though they are employed.
11 The number of electric utility customers in arrears and facing
12 disconnection is higher than before the COVID-19 pandemic, with
13 thousands of customers collectively owing millions of dollars.
14 In addition, electricity needs are expected to increase due to
15 rising temperatures and associated home cooling needs.

16 In 2022, the legislature adopted S.C.R. No. 242, S.D. 1
17 (2022), which requested the public utilities commission, in



1 collaboration with the division of consumer advocacy of the
2 department of commerce and consumer affairs, to convene a
3 working group to create a Hawaii low-income home energy
4 assistance program. As noted in a December 2022 report to the
5 legislature submitted by the public utilities commission, the
6 federal low-income home energy assistance program funded by the
7 United States Department of Health and Human Services and
8 administered by the department of human services, a program
9 designed to provide energy assistance to families, served fewer
10 than nine thousand households in Hawaii in 2020, or about two
11 per cent of the State's population potentially eligible for
12 energy assistance based on income. The State received the
13 lowest amount of federal funding for the federal low-income home
14 energy assistance program of all states in fiscal year 2021-
15 2022. According to estimates from the National Energy and
16 Utility Affordability Coalition, Hawaii received 0.14 per cent
17 of federal low-income home energy assistance program funds in
18 fiscal year 2021-2022, roughly half of the next-lowest state.
19 Funding for states is determined based on a formula developed in
20 1984, which inherently favors states with large heating needs
21 and does not consider specific electricity prices within states.



1 The legislature further finds that, in addition to the
2 limited financial assistance available through the United States
3 Department of Health and Human Services from the federal
4 low-income home energy assistance program, the public benefits
5 fee administrator of the public utilities commission plays a
6 vital role in ensuring that all available state and federal
7 benefits and rebate programs are being utilized by providing
8 opportunities and solutions for Hawaii residents and businesses
9 to save money and energy. The legislature also finds that the
10 State must commit to providing assistance to low-income
11 households that are directly impacted due to the high cost of
12 electricity.

13 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to provide eligible
14 households with assistance related to energy costs by:

15 (1) Establishing a Hawaii home energy assistance program
16 within the department of human services and
17 authorizing the department to assist eligible
18 households with the payment of costs associated with
19 meeting their home energy needs; and

20 (2) Requiring the public benefits fee administrator of the
21 public utilities commission to provide recipients of



1 the Hawaii home energy assistance program with
2 information and support designed to enhance home
3 energy efficiency and reduce electricity costs.

4 SECTION 2. Chapter 346, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
5 amended by adding a new section to part II to be appropriately
6 designated and to read as follows:

7 "§346- Hawaii home energy assistance program;
8 established. (a) There is established within the department
9 the Hawaii home energy assistance program. Subject to the
10 availability of program funds, the program may assist eligible
11 households with payment of costs associated with meeting the
12 eligible household's home energy needs.

13 (b) Any person who is in need of public assistance may
14 submit an application on a form prescribed by the department
15 that includes, at a minimum, documentation to prove that the
16 person:

- 17 (1) Is a resident of the State;
- 18 (2) Has an active utilities account in the State; and
- 19 (3) Satisfies the income limit and all other eligibility
20 standards established by the department in rules
21 adopted pursuant to subsection (d).



1 (c) The public benefits fee administrator of the public
2 utilities commission, in consultation with the department, shall
3 provide information and technical assistance about available
4 energy efficiency programs to recipients, including an energy
5 audit at the request of a recipient, and assist recipients with
6 implementation of energy efficiency improvements, in accordance
7 with section 269-123(b).

8 (d) The department shall adopt rules pursuant to
9 chapter 91 for purposes of this section."

10 SECTION 3. Section 269-123, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
11 amended by amending subsection (b) to read as follows:

12 "(b) The public benefits fee administrator's duties and
13 responsibilities shall be established by the public utilities
14 commission by rule or order, and may include:

15 (1) Identifying, developing, administering, promoting,
16 implementing, and evaluating programs, methods, and
17 technologies that support energy-efficiency and
18 demand-side management programs;

19 (2) Encouraging the continuance or improvement of
20 efficiencies made in the production, delivery, and use



- 1 of energy-efficiency and demand-side management
2 programs and services;
- 3 (3) Using the energy-efficiency expertise and capabilities
4 that have developed or may develop in the State and
5 consulting with state agency experts;
- 6 (4) Promoting program initiatives, incentives, and market
7 strategies that address the needs of persons facing
8 the most significant barriers to participation;
- 9 (5) Promoting coordinated program delivery, including
10 coordination with electric public utilities regarding
11 the delivery of low-income home energy assistance,
12 other demand-side management or energy-efficiency
13 programs, and any utility programs;
- 14 (6) Consideration of innovative approaches to delivering
15 demand-side management and energy-efficiency services,
16 including strategies to encourage third-party
17 financing and customer contributions to the cost of
18 demand-side management and energy-efficiency services;
- 19 (7) Submitting, to the public utilities commission for
20 review and approval, a multi-year budget and planning
21 cycle that promotes program improvement, program



1 stability, and maturation of programs and delivery
2 resources; [~~and~~]

3 (8) Educating and training appliance manufacturers,
4 distributors, and retailers of appliances covered
5 under part VI of chapter 196 about the appliance
6 efficiency standards established under that part to
7 improve compliance[~~-~~]; and

8 (9) Providing information and technical assistance about
9 available energy efficiency programs to recipients of
10 the Hawaii home energy assistance program established
11 pursuant to section 346- , including an energy audit
12 if requested by the recipient, and assisting the
13 recipients with implementation of energy efficiency
14 improvements."

15 SECTION 4. There is appropriated out of the general
16 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so
17 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for
18 the purposes of implementing the Hawaii home energy assistance
19 program established pursuant to section 2 of this Act.

20 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of
21 human services for the purposes of this Act.



1 SECTION 5. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed
2 and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

3 SECTION 6. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 3000.



Report Title:

DHS; PUC; Hawaii Home Energy Assistance Program; Appropriation

Description:

Establishes the Hawaii Home Energy Assistance Program within the Department of Human Services to assist qualifying households in paying their energy bills. Requires the Public Benefits Fee Administrator of the Public Utilities Commission to provide certain information and assistance to recipients of the program. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.

