



130th MAINE LEGISLATURE

SECOND REGULAR SESSION-2022

Legislative Document

No. 2006

H.P. 1492

House of Representatives, March 2, 2022

An Act To Improve the Low-income Home Energy Assistance Program

(AFTER DEADLINE)

(EMERGENCY)

Approved for introduction by a majority of the Legislative Council pursuant to Joint Rule 205.

Received by the Clerk of the House on February 28, 2022. Referred to the Committee on Labor and Housing pursuant to Joint Rule 308.2 and ordered printed pursuant to Joint Rule 401.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert B. Hunt".

ROBERT B. HUNT
Clerk

Presented by Representative LaROCHELLE of Augusta.
Cosponsored by Representatives: CUDDY of Winterport, GERE of Kennebunkport,
PEBworth of Blue Hill, ROEDER of Bangor, TALBOT ROSS of Portland, TEPLER of
Topsham.

1 **Emergency preamble.** Whereas, acts and resolves of the Legislature do not
2 become effective until 90 days after adjournment unless enacted as emergencies; and

3 **Whereas,** the price of home heating fuel has increased dramatically over the past year;
4 and

5 **Whereas,** there have been significant delays in providing Low-income Home Energy
6 Assistance Program funds and processing and approving applications in a timely manner
7 has been a challenge; and

8 **Whereas,** it is essential to the health and safety of the elderly, the disabled and the
9 most vulnerable in our State that the State provide funds to help speed the application
10 process and provide emergency assistance; and

11 **Whereas,** in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts create an emergency within
12 the meaning of the Constitution of Maine and require the following legislation as
13 immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now,
14 therefore,

15 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:**

16 **Sec. 1. Payments or assistance not considered income or resources for any**
17 **purpose under state law.** Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary unless
18 enacted in express limitation of this section, the amount of any home energy assistance
19 payments or allowances provided directly to, or indirectly for the benefit of, a household
20 under this Act may not be considered income or resources of that household or any member
21 of that household for any purpose under any state law, including any law relating to
22 taxation, food stamps, public assistance or welfare programs.

23 **Sec. 2. Fund created.** The Maine State Housing Authority shall create the Low-
24 income Home Energy Assistance Program Administrative Efficiency Fund. This fund
25 must be used for the purpose of increasing the capacity to accept and process applications
26 in a timely manner for the current heating season. This may include but is not limited to
27 the hiring of temporary workers, purchasing technology or contracting with a 3rd party.
28 The fund may also be used for providing resources to establish a long-term system to
29 efficiently process Low-income Home Energy Assistance Program applications in future
30 years.

31 **Sec. 3. Unused funds.** Any balance remaining of the funds provided in section 5 at
32 the end of the fiscal year may be carried over to the next fiscal year for the same purpose.

33 **Sec. 4. Working group.** The Maine State Housing Authority shall convene a working
34 group to investigate ways to improve and increase the efficiency of the Low-income Home
35 Energy Assistance Program administered through the United States Department of Health
36 and Human Services. The working group must include representatives of community action
37 programs and the Department of Health and Human Services; one or more individuals who
38 have used the program; fuel providers; organizations that advocate for low-income to
39 moderate-income households, economic justice or improved government operations; and
40 any other individual or organization that the Maine State Housing Authority or the working
41 group determines to be beneficial to the purposes of the working group.

1 The working group shall investigate how to reduce both the waiting times for
2 application appointments and the time required to approve applications. These
3 investigations must include solutions using technology and the possibility of online
4 applications and improving staffing levels and the ability to access information such as
5 income information already on file with the Department of Health and Human Services.
6 The working group also shall examine the practices of other states in the administration of
7 their low-income home energy assistance programs.

8 The working group shall provide a report no later than September 15, 2022 regarding
9 how it plans to improve efficiency and reduce waiting times to the Joint Standing
10 Committee on Labor and Housing.

11 **Sec. 5. Appropriations and allocations.** The following appropriations and
12 allocations are made.

13 **MAINE STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY**

14 **Low-income Home Energy Assistance Program Administrative Efficiency Fund**

15 Initiative: Provides funding for the purpose of increasing the capacity to accept and process
16 applications in a timely manner.

17 GENERAL FUND	2021-22	2022-23
18 All Other	\$2,000,000	\$0
19		
20 GENERAL FUND TOTAL	<u>\$2,000,000</u>	<u>\$0</u>

21 **Emergency clause.** In view of the emergency cited in the preamble, this legislation
22 takes effect when approved.

23 **SUMMARY**

24 This bill provides funding of \$2,000,000 to the Maine State Housing Authority to
25 improve application waiting and approval times for the Low-income Home Energy
26 Assistance Program administered through the United States Department of Health and
27 Human Services. It requires the Maine State Housing Authority to create the Low-income
28 Home Energy Assistance Program Administrative Efficiency Fund. It also requires the
29 Maine State Housing Authority to convene a working group to investigate ways to improve
30 and increase the efficiency of the Low-income Home Energy Assistance Program. The
31 working group must report to the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing no later
32 than September 15, 2022.