

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5904

*As Reported By House Committee on:
Energy & Utilities*

Title: An act relating to home heating assistance for low-income persons.

Brief Description: Extending until 1995 home heating assistance for low-income persons.

Sponsor(s): Senators Thorsness, Conner and Sutherland.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Energy & Utilities, April 4, 1991, DPA.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY & UTILITIES**

Majority Report: *Do pass as amended.* Signed by 11 members: Representatives Grant, Chair; H. Myers, Vice Chair; May, Ranking Minority Member; Hochstatter, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bray; Casada; Cooper; R. Fisher; Jacobsen; Miller; and Rayburn.

Staff: Fred Adair (786-7113).

Background: Winter heating expenses can be overwhelming for some low-income persons, sometimes exceeding mortgage or rent payments. A means to spread out payments can help in some cases.

In 1990 the Legislature renewed a 1984 law that limits the ability of utilities to terminate residential space heat during the winter months. The 1984 legislation specified that customers were subject to several requirements before they could become eligible for the program. These requirements include verification of income, agreeing to a payment plan, applying for public and private financial assistance, and applying for weatherization assistance.

Utilities are required to notify customers of the provisions of the legislation and to offer budget billing to all customers. This entire program is referred to as the "moratorium" program.

The number of citizens using the moratorium program has declined over the years, but still remains a "safety net" for some low-income persons. Additionally, the program has promoted a closer and more beneficial relationship between utilities and many of their customers.

The program expires June 30, 1991.

Summary of Amended Bill: The program limiting winter heat termination is extended indefinitely.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill: The 1995 program expiration date is eliminated.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The program is still needed. It is valuable for certain low-income persons. We prefer not to have a sunset date and be forced to have another bill in a few years. The need will continue far into the future.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Collins Sprague, The Washington Water Power Company; Terry Oxley, Puget Sound Power and Light Company; Ron Newbry, Pacific Power and Light Company; and Mike Ryherd, Washington Low-Income Housing Congress.