

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5362

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Environment, Water & Energy, February 4, 2011

Title: An act relating to authorizing public utility districts to request voluntary contributions to assist low-income customers with payment of water and sewer bills.

Brief Description: Authorizing public utility districts to request voluntary contributions to assist low-income customers with payment of water and sewer bills.

Sponsors: Senators Chase, Prentice, White, Nelson, Kastama, Fraser, Shin, Harper, Hatfield, Conway, McAuliffe and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Environment, Water & Energy: 1/28/11, 2/04/11 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, WATER & ENERGY

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Rockefeller, Chair; Nelson, Vice Chair; Honeyford, Ranking Minority Member; Chase, Delvin, Fraser, Holmquist Newbry, Morton and Ranker.

Staff: Jan Odano (786-7486)

Background: Public utility districts (PUD) are municipal corporations authorized under Washington statute to conserve the water and power resources of Washington and to supply public utility service, including water and electricity for all uses. PUDs may request voluntary contributions from their regular customers to help low-income residential customers pay their electricity bills. All contributions must be used to assist low-income residential customers.

All voluntary contributions must be transmitted to a grantee of the Department of Commerce (Commerce), which administers federally funded energy assistance programs for the state in the district's service area; a charitable organization within the district's service area; or retained by the PUD. These funds are used solely to supplement assistance to low-income residential customers of the district in paying their electricity bills. The PUD, grantee, or charitable organization is responsible for determining which of the district's customers are qualified for low-income assistance and the amount of assistance to be provided. The PUD, grantee, or charitable organization disburse the contributions. Where possible, the PUD will

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be paid on behalf of the customer. When direct vendor payment is not feasible, a check will be issued jointly payable to the customer and to the PUD.

The funds received through voluntary contributions to the PUD's low-income customers must not reduce the amount of assistance for which low-income customers are eligible under the federally funded energy assistance programs administered by Commerce within the district's service area.

Summary of Bill: A PUD, through its regular customer billings, may request voluntary contributions to assist qualified low-income residential customers in paying their water and sewer bills. The contributions must be used only to supplement assistance to low-income residential customers in paying their water and sewer bills.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill will allow PUDs that provide water and sewer to assist their low-income customers with their bills.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Paul Pickett, Chris Stearns, Commissioners, Thurston PUD; Bill Clarke, WA PUD Association.