

Item 5: Housing and Community Services Department

Energy Assistance

Analyst: Michelle Deister

Request: Establish an Other Funds expenditure limitation of \$15,000,000 for the Housing and Community Services Department (HCSD) for funding from the Coronavirus Relief Fund received by the Department of Administrative Services and transferred to HCSD for energy assistance payments to Oregonians with incomes adversely impacted by circumstances due to COVID-19.

Description: The Housing and Community Services Department (HCSD) will leverage existing systems, including its Master Grant Agreement, to make grants available to Community Action Agency Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) recipients and award funds utilizing the existing LIEAP formula. Funds will be utilized for program delivery and direct bill payment assistance on behalf of residential customers of electric and natural gas utilities. The HCSD will design this program in alignment with existing energy assistance programs while broadening income eligibility and benefit levels to be responsive to Oregonians who have suffered loss of income due to circumstances arising from COVID-19.

Income eligibility thresholds will be evaluated and expanded to households at or below 80% of area median income (existing LIEAP income limitation is 60% of area median income). Standard household benefit levels may be increased under the program design to account for additional utility arrearages due to COVID-19. Eligibility standards may also be expanded to include “categorical eligibility,” which means that applicants already enrolled in specified state-administered low income assistance programs can be automatically eligible for these energy assistance dollars.

Recommendation: The Co-Chairs of the Emergency Board recommend establishing an Other Funds expenditure limitation of \$15,000,000 for the Housing and Community Services Department (HCSD) funded from the Coronavirus Relief Fund received by the Department of Administrative Services and transferred to HCSD for energy assistance payments to Oregonians with incomes adversely impacted by circumstances due to COVID-19.