

HB 2739 -2 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Human Services

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Meeting Dates: 3/31, 4/7, 4/12

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Creates a water and sewer bill payment assistance program to be administered by Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS). Appropriates \$15 million for deposit into newly created Public Drinking Water and Sewer Ratepayer Assistance Fund for grants to qualified organizations, as specified, to assistance to low-income residential households. Directs OHCS to adopt rules for the administration of said grant program considering all other assistance programs it administers.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Provisions of original measure
- Charging customers that receive power from independent power producers in amendment
- Cap on monthly payment per meter per site by large industrial customers in amendment
- Qualification for assistance and meter charges for customers that receive benefit in amendment

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

-2 Replaces the original measure. Directs the Public Utility Commission (PUC) to establish the amount to be collected and rates to be charged by each electric company from its customers for low-income electric bill payment and crisis assistance. Mandates that funds collected be paid into the Low-Income Electric Bill Payment Assistance Fund administered by OHCS. Requires that the \$500 for large industrial customers that applies to the current \$20m electric bill payment assistance fund applies to the additional (temporary) \$10m increase.

BACKGROUND:

The U.S. Geological Survey reports that about 86 percent of the U.S. population relies on a public utility for their drinking water or wastewater services. With 12 percent of the adult population living below poverty level in both Oregon and the U.S. in 2018, some customers may have difficulty paying their water bills. A number of water and wastewater utilities have developed customer assistance programs as an approach to help financially constrained customers maintain access to drinking water and wastewater services.

House Bill 2739 establishes a Public Drinking Water and Sewer Ratepayer Assistance Fund to distribute water and sewer bill payment assistance to low-income residential households.