

HB 3089 -1 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Water

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Sub-Referral To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means

Meeting Dates: 2/18, 4/13

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Establishes Public Drinking Water and Sewer Ratepayer Assistance Fund. Appropriates moneys in fund to Housing and Community Services Department. Appropriates \$15,000,000 to Department, for biennium beginning July 1, 2021, to deposit into Public Drinking Water and Sewer Ratepayer Assistance Fund. Directs Department to provide grants to qualified organizations, including nonprofit community-based organizations and municipal utilities providing domestic water or sewer service, to distribute water and bill pay assistance to low-income residential households.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Increased need for utility bill assistance, especially due to COVID-19
- Role of water utilities in providing financial support to ratepayers
- Benefit of developing a statewide water burden map

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

-1 Changes “Municipal utilities providing domestic water or sewer service” to “Public utilities providing domestic water or sewer service.”

FISCAL: May have fiscal impact, but no statement yet issued.

REVENUE: May have revenue impact, but no statement yet issued.

BACKGROUND:

Households across Oregon face financial hardships in paying water and sewer bills, especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Cities and water districts across the state have allocated funds to partner organizations to help residents in need of utility assistance. Additionally, utility providers have ceased disconnections of water and sewer service due to non-payment, but now see increases in the number of past due accounts.

In December 2020, Congress passed a \$900 billion COVID relief bill. In March 2021, Congress passed an additional \$1.9 trillion COVID relief bill. Between both relief packages, an estimated \$1.14 billion was appropriated to low-income water and wastewater utility assistance.

House Bill 3089 would establish a Public Drinking Water and Sewer Ratepayer Assistance Fund to provide grants to organizations to distribute water and sewer bill payment assistance to low-income residential households.