

HB 3089 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Water

Action Date: 04/13/21

Action: Without recommendation as to passage, with amendments, and be referred to Ways and Means by prior reference. (Printed A-Eng.)

Vote: 8-0-0-0

Yeas: 8 - Breese-Iverson, Helm, Leif, Owens, Reardon, Reynolds, Wilde, Witt

Fiscal: Fiscal impact issued

Revenue: No revenue impact

Prepared By: Allison Daniel, LPRO Analyst

Meeting Dates: 2/18, 4/13

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Establishes Public Drinking Water and Sewer Ratepayer Assistance Fund (Fund). Appropriates moneys in Fund to Housing and Community Services Department. Appropriates \$15,000,000 to the Department, for the biennium beginning July 1, 2021, to deposit into Fund. Directs Department to provide grants to qualified organizations, including nonprofit community-based organizations and public utilities providing domestic water or sewer service, to distribute water and bill pay assistance to low-income residential households. Directs Department to adopt rules to administer and implement the program and, in adopting rules, to consider other utility bill payment or crisis assistance and low-income assistance programs administered by the Department.

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:

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

BACKGROUND:

Households across Oregon face financial hardships in paying water and sewer bills, especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 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.

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 nonpayment, but now see an increasing number of past due accounts.

House Bill 3089 A 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. The measure would deposit \$15,000,000 in this Fund.