

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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FIRST REGULAR SESSION

ONE HUNDRED AND NINTH LEGISLATURE

Legislative Document

No. 907

H. P. 683

House of Representatives, March 2, 1979

Speaker laid before the House and referred to the Committee on Aging, Retirement and Veterans. Sent up for concurrence and ordered printed.

EDWIN H. PERT, Clerk

Presented by Mr. Brenerman of Portland.

Cosponsors: Mrs. Mitchell of Vassalboro, Mr. Joyce of Portland and Mr. Tarbell of Bangor.

STATE OF MAINE

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD NINETEEN HUNDRED
SEVENTY-NINE

AN ACT to Establish a Demonstration Project to Create a Grant and Loan Program to Assist Older Citizens in Purchasing Medically Prescribed Eyeglasses, Dentures and Hearing Aids.

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine, as follows:

Sec. 1. 22 MRSA § 3186 is enacted to read:

§ 3186. Policy

It is declared that it is the policy of the State to ensure that older citizens obtain eyeglasses, dentures and hearing aids at a cost based on their ability to pay. The average income of Maine's elderly in 1979 is \$2,884 a year, which places the older citizen in a special crisis in surviving under constant increases in the cost of living. The lack of federal and state assistance to help the older citizen obtain desperately needed medical appliances including eyeglasses, dentures and hearing aids leaves the older citizen little ability to obtain these items on a fixed income. It is the purpose of this grant and loan program to provide needed eyeglasses, dentures and hearing aids to older citizens at a cost which they can afford.

Sec. 2. 22 MRSA § 3187 is enacted to read:

§ 3187. Definitions

As used in this chapter, unless the context otherwise indicates, the following terms shall have the following meanings.

1. **Dentures.** "Dentures" means partial and full dentures prescribed by a dentist licensed to practice dentistry or dental surgery in this State.

2. **Eyeglasses.** "Eyeglasses" means lens which provide for more than minor refraction error including 2 diopters or over for hyperopia, 1 diopter or over for astigmatism, .75 or more for myopia or provide visual correction deemed necessary when these conditions do not exist as prescribed by an ophthalmologist or an optometrist licensed to practice in the State, plus frames not exceeding \$15.

3. **Hearing Aids.** "Hearing aid" means aid and ear mold appropriate to the needs of the individual as prescribed by otologists licensed to practice medicine in the State, audiologists qualified to provide hearing examinations in the State and hearing aid dealers and fitters licensed by the State.

4. **Older Citizen.** "Older citizen" means a Maine citizen aged 60 years or older.

Sec. 3. 22 MRSA § 3188. is enacted to read:

§ 3188. Grant and Loan Demonstration Program to Provide Medically Prescribed Eyeglasses, Dentures and Hearing Aids to Older Citizens

The Bureau of Maine's Elderly with the advice of the Maine Committee on Aging and the Bureau of Health shall develop administrative regulations for a 12-month demonstration grant and loan program to provide medically prescribed eyeglasses, dentures and hearing aids to older citizens that shall include the following:

1. **Selection criteria.** Selection of a small sized municipality, under 2,500 population; a medium sized municipality, 2,500 to 10,000 population; and a large sized municipality, over 10,000 population in each of the 5-area agencies on aging planning areas in Maine. These 15 municipalities shall be the municipalities in which the demonstration program will be conducted;

2. **Eligibility.** Older citizens in the 15 demonstration communities will be eligible;

3. **Administration.** The grant and loan demonstration program will be administered by applicable divisions and boards within the Bureau of Health;

4. **Grant and loan schedules.** The regulations shall include grant and loan schedules that will be based on the older citizens ability to pay; and

5. **Time frame.** Regulations shall be developed by December 1, 1979 and approved by the Commissioner of Human Services by December 30, 1979. Program start date shall be January 1, 1980.

Sec. 4. 22 MRSA § 3189 is enacted to read:

§ 3189. Review

After completion of the 12-month demonstration program, the Maine Committee on Aging shall hold public hearings to review the demonstration program and report its findings and recommendations to the Legislature prior to the last day of 1981.

Sec. 5. Appropriation. The following funds shall be appropriated from the General Fund to carry out the purposes of this Act.

1979-80

HUMAN SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF

Grant and Loan Demonstration Program to
Provide Medically Prescribed Eyeglasses,
Dentures and Hearing Aids to Older Citizens

All Other

\$150,000

Provides funds for planning costs,
development of administrative regulations,
and operational costs of the demonstration
grant and loan program.

These funds shall not lapse on June 30, 1980,
but shall carry forward for the same
purposes.

STATEMENT OF FACT

During 6 public hearings held statewide among older citizens by the Bureau of Maine's Elderly and the Maine Committee on Aging, the most commonly mentioned complaint concerned the difficulty Maine's elderly face is paying for eyeglasses, denture and hearing aids. The establishment of a grant and loan fund to assist older citizens to meet these costs was a top priority of the Blaine House Conference on Aging and the Maine Committee on Aging.

Given that Medicare and Medicaid pay only 40% of the total health care costs of older citizens; given that the average income of Maine's elderly is \$2,884 a year; given that older Americans suffer from chronic vision impairment more frequently than from any other ailment except arthritis; given that over 50% of all people over 60 suffer from impaired hearing; given that nearly 50% of all persons over 60 are without any natural teeth, with over 36% requiring new or repaired dentures; and given that most normal costs of eyeglasses, dentures and hearing aids are not covered under the Medicaid program, older citizens seek a grant and loan fund which would allow older citizens to pay what they can afford toward the cost of eyeglasses, dentures and hearing aids while the program would make up the difference of the actual cost.

This program will provide grants and loans based upon income and need, as defined in the regulations, to older citizens in 15 demonstration communities statewide.

The intent of this bill is to provide medically prescribed eyeglasses, dentures and hearing aids to older citizens based on their ability to pay while at the same time collecting data on the demonstrated need for these medical appliances and the efficiency of administration through existing Bureau of Health mechanisms.