

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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(EMERGENCY)
FIRST REGULAR SESSION

ONE HUNDRED AND NINTH LEGISLATURE

Legislative Document

No. 1382

S. P. 431

In Senate, March 20, 1979

On Motion of Senator Pierce of Kennebec, referred to the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. Sent down for concurrence and ordered printed.

Presented by Senator Silverman of Washington.

MAY M. ROSS, Secretary of the Senate

STATE OF MAINE

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD NINETEEN HUNDRED
SEVENTY-NINE

AN ACT to Provide an Elderly Home Heating and Cooking Fuels Program.

Emergency preamble. Whereas, Acts of the Legislature do not become effective until 90 days after adjournment unless enacted as emergencies; and

Whereas, the federal Emergency Energy Program and the Winter Emergency Assistance Program have made insufficient funds available to Maine to cover low income expenditures for fuel; and

Whereas, many older citizens of Maine are faced with high energy bills and low incomes with which they meet all expenses; and

Whereas, applications for the elderly householders tax and rent refund program are taken after August 1st and before October 15 of each year; and

Whereas, the elderly home heating and cooking fuels program would be of substantial assistance to low income older people if the supplement could be attached to their elderly householders tax and rent refund benefit to pay this past winter's fuel bills; and

Whereas, in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts create an emergency within the meaning of the Constitution of Maine and require the following

legislation as immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now, therefore,

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

Sec. 1. 36 MRSA c. 910 is enacted to read:

CHAPTER 910

ELDERLY HOME HEATING AND COOKING FUELS PROGRAM

§ 6251. Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to add to the elderly householders tax and rent refund benefit a supplement to help cover the cost of home heating and cooking for the low income elderly.

§ 6252. Eligibility criteria

1. Eligibility for relief. To be eligible for relief under this chapter, an individual shall:

- A. Qualify as a claimant under section 6103, subsection 1;
- B. Be a member of a household which meets the age and income criteria of the Elderly Householders Tax and Rent Refund Act; and
- C. Not rent a homestead of which the rent is partially or fully subsidized by the Federal Government.

§ 6253. Benefits

An individual eligible under this chapter shall receive \$80 if he owned his homestead on April 1st of the year for which the benefit is claimed and \$40 if he rented his homestead on April 1st of that year.

The home heating and cooking fuels benefit shall be in addition to all other benefits provided in this Part.

§ 6254. Administration

Sections 6104 to 6107 and sections 6113 to 6119 are also applicable to this chapter.

§ 6255. Effective date

This program shall be effective July 1, 1979.

Sec. 2. Appropriation. The following funds shall be appropriated from the General Fund to carry out the purposes of this Act.

1979-80

1980-81

FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION,
DEPARTMENT OF

Bureau of Taxation

| | | |
|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| All Other | \$1,600,000 | \$1,600,600 |
|-----------|-------------|-------------|

Emergency clause. In view of the emergency cited in the preamble, this Act shall take effect when approved.

STATEMENT OF FACT

One of the most critical needs of Maine's 170,000 older citizens today is the huge financial cost of energy which is necessary to heat homes and to cook food. Considering that the median income of Maine's older population is \$2,884 a year, or \$241 a month, and is usually a fixed income, it is nearly impossible for older low income citizens to pay for the rising cost of fuel and still maintain a minimum standard of living. Their only hope is to turn to the Legislature for financial assistance in this crisis situation.

The older people of Maine are committed to the desire to "pay their way" and it is by no fault of theirs that the society in which they live has no control of runaway inflation due to the increased costs of energy. Further, there is no relief in sight.

Federal programs which provide funds to pay for low income energy bills are limited and the future of these programs is tenuous. Approximately \$502,000 is available to Maine through the Emergency Energy Program and the Winter Emergency Assistance Program this year. These limited funds must provide financial assistance in meeting fuel expenses to all low income residents of Maine, including the elderly. This amount is sufficient to meet the energy costs of Maine's low income elderly population alone. In comparison, the State of Maine receives \$3,140,000 if fiscal year 1978 for this program.

The purpose of this bill is to provide a guaranteed income supplement to assist low income elderly residents to pay for the high costs of home heating and cooking fuels. This program would provide elderly who are currently receiving benefits under the Elderly Householders Tax and Rent Refund Program a supplemental amount to assist them in meeting fuel costs. The amount of the supplement will not affect the amount of the Elderly Householders Tax and Rent Refund Check. Maine residents over age 62 whose income is less than \$5,000 for an individual or less than \$6,000 for a household of 2 or more would be eligible for both programs.