

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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FIRST REGULAR SESSION

ONE HUNDRED AND TENTH LEGISLATURE

Legislative Document

No. 1255

H. P. 1036

House of Representatives, March 11, 1981

Referred to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. Sent up for concurrence and ordered printed.

EDWIN H. PERT, Clerk

Presented by Representative Connolly of Portland.

Cosponsor: Representative Brodeur of Auburn.

STATE OF MAINE

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD NINETEEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-ONE

AN ACT to Encourage Neighborhood Volunteer Programs to Keep Homes Warm.

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

5 MRSA c. 314 is enacted to read:

CHAPTER 314

NEIGHBORHOOD VOLUNTEER

PROGRAM

§ 3331. Purpose

1. **Legislative findings.** The Legislature finds that the crisis of heating Maine homes has become of great and ever-increasing severity; that this heating crisis occurs at a time when government's ability to finance needed assistance grows less each year, and that one of the few hopeful solutions to this continuous crisis is the existence of local, volunteer efforts by neighbors and businesses seeking to protect their less fortunate neighbors from the cold.

2. **Purpose.** The purpose of this chapter is to establish an office that will provide practical assistance to regional and local groups interested in providing volunteer help to neighbors in need of protection from the cold.

§ 3332. Governor's office for volunteer programs

The Governor shall establish, within 30 days after this chapter becomes law, the Governor's Office for Volunteer Home Heating Programs. This office will be a part of the Division of Community Services, or a successor agency, and its main purposes shall be to:

1. **List.** Compile a detailed list of all existing sources of home heating or insulation assistance, including current volunteer programs, cooperating oil dealers, social and religious agencies and other sources of emergency heating assistance.

2. **Establishment.** Encourage and assist the establishment of regional and local volunteer programs to assist persons in heating and insulating their homes; and

3. **Promotions.** Advise the Governor on new ways to promote the growth of Maine volunteer groups to assist persons in need of home heat.

§ 3333. Director

The Governor shall appoint, within 45 days after this chapter becomes law, a Director of the Governor's Office for Volunteer Home Heating Programs. This director shall be a volunteer and shall serve without pay.

STATEMENT OF FACT

The purpose of this bill is to help Maine citizens in need of home heat through local business and neighborhood volunteer programs.

This bill would establish, within the department of the Executive Division of Community Services, a Governor's Office of Volunteer Home Heating Programs. The director of this office would be a volunteer, serving without pay.

The great burden for many persons in heating one's home in Maine can be explained by 2 simple factors, high prices and lack of credit:

1. The ever-increasing price of oil, in 1979-80 it was double over prices the winter before, far outdistances the fixed or declining, due to inflation, assets of Maine's middle or low income persons; and

2. Home heating oil is a very large and unavoidable expense that homeowners must pay for over the course of only a few months. Since many Maine citizens are not eligible for oil dealer credit, today's escalating price of oil can shatter even the most careful budgets.

These 2 factors, ever higher prices, unanswered need for credit, can be dramatized through a simple example: If a person skimps and burns only 5 gallons a day in January, this means he must use at least 150 gallons and that his oil bill for that month alone, at March, 1981 prices, will be approximately \$195. This could represent 50% of the salary of many low income Maine persons and still to be paid for would be housing, food and other expenses. As oil prices continue to increase

and as inflation further decreases the assets of persons on fixed incomes, welfare recipients suffered a 17.5% average reduction in after-tax income from 1967 to 1978, this example can only become more harsh. Further, there are reports that next year's Federal Fuel Assistance Program is to be cut back.

The low income population in Maine is quite large. It has been estimated that there might be as many as 90,000 households whose family income is less than 125% of the Community Services Administration Guidelines. In January, 1978 the low income elderly households in Piscataquis County served by the Diocesan Human Relations Services averaged \$237 income a month. At last winter's comparatively low prices, heating oil purchases accounted for 42.23% of that income.

The plight of Maine's middle income persons is, of course, not as severe, but they, too, face the same pressures and problems, especially those workers who are temporarily laid off due to a weak economy.

Government's ability to financially assist its needy citizens is limited. This bill will encourage local businesses and citizens to form volunteer groups to help their neighbors in need.

It is the intention of the Legislature that the Division of Community Services will provide sufficient funds to finance the day-to-day operations of the Governor's Office for Volunteer Programs, including traveling, printing and communication expenses. The director of this office shall be a volunteer and shall serve without pay.