

# **MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE**

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LAWS  
OF THE  
**STATE OF MAINE**  
AS PASSED BY THE

ONE HUNDRED AND NINTH LEGISLATURE

FIRST REGULAR SESSION

January 3, 1979 to June 15, 1979

PUBLISHED BY THE DIRECTOR OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH IN ACCORDANCE WITH MAINE REVISED STATUTES ANNOTATED, TITLE 3, SECTION 164, SUBSECTION 6.

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Kennebec Journal  
Augusta, Maine  
1979

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# **ADDRESS**

**October 4, 1979**

**by**

**GOVERNOR JOSEPH E. BRENNAN**

**to the**

**FIRST SPECIAL SESSION**

**One Hundred and Ninth Legislature**

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# ADDRESS

The coming of winter in Maine is traditionally a time of difficulty for us all.

Fuel bills grow, travel becomes difficult, and illnesses increase.

However, Maine people generally are able to cope with the burden of winter.

You are here today, however, because the coming winter promises to be an exceptional one.

Rarely, if ever, in our history has a fundamental necessity of life increased in cost as dramatically as fuel oil has in the past year.

From 55 cents a gallon to 85 cents a gallon.

A 60 per cent increase in less than one year.

A \$330 increase for the average strained budget in a state which already, according to some studies, has the lowest per capita income when you factor in the cost of energy.

The people of Maine may not be a concern of the OPEC nations.

But they are our concern.

The oil cartels don't have to worry about the health and well-being of our people.

But we do.

Congress may seem like it has forgotten that winter is coming.

But we cannot.

I say we cannot sit idly by while many of our people are forced to choose between necessities of life.

Most of us can adjust our budgets to absorb the dramatic increase in fuel costs.

But some cannot.

Thousands of our most vulnerable citizens do not have the financial flexibility to meet extraordinary cost increases.

The elderly, those living on fixed incomes, and thousands of Maine children need our help.

For, without help, the neediest will have to choose between fuel or food.

The issue today before the Legislature is whether or not we are going to meet our obligations as a government, or whether we are going to turn a deaf ear to our people.

I have heard concerns raised in the past few days about the ability of state government to pay for this program.

Some say state government can't afford to spend the money.

I say state government can't afford not to spend it.

Some say the money isn't there and that we have already made our financial commitments.

I say that there is no higher priority than the essentials of life—food, shelter, health, and safety.

What I am proposing today is not a government giveaway.

What I am proposing today is that we fulfill our obligation and see to it that our most vulnerable citizens do not go without the necessities of life.

It is a short-term, one-time emergency assistance program.

It provides financial aid for the neediest.

And it also includes funds to accelerate our long-range conservation program, for we recognize that emergency aid does nothing to prevent the same crisis from happening a year from now, and two years from now, and every winter that comes before we finally reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

Most of you are already familiar with the details of my bill.

You have received copies of the legislation and the Appropriations Committee has already met to discuss it.

So I will limit my presentation to a brief summary.

The bill contains an appropriation of \$5.1 million to meet our obligations to the neediest.

This money would be used to provide payments for homeowners and renters who need help paying their fuel bills.

It allows them the flexibility to apply it as they see fit.

It could be used to pay their fuel dealers.

But it could also be used to purchase insulation materials.

At the same time the bill responds to your concerns that the money be spent for the reasons intended.

It provides that our tax monies will be paid directly to the fuel vendors or merchants.

Some have criticized the program for including renters who do not directly pay their own fuel bills.

I have to say that I believe such criticism overlooks a basic economic fact.

Even if renters are not paying their fuel bills directly, they are still paying.

Landlords do not usually absorb high price increases.

They pass them along.

Those who rent their homes do so because they cannot afford the financial burden of a down payment and a mortgage.

These price increases will hurt them just as much, if not more, than any other group.

And we would be neglecting our responsibility if we ignored them in our aid plan.

I have heard criticism against my plan because it includes additional funds for AFDC Recipients.

I know that to many people in our state the very designation of AFDC raises a red flag and causes automatic opposition, if not outright hostility.

But a vote against this bill because of the AFDC provision will be a vote to deny assistance to the 40,000 Maine children in the neediest households in the State of Maine.

And, initially, we may appear to save a few dollars by doing so.

But there will be added expenses to state government in higher medical costs and higher expenses for general assistance.

And there will be added costs in ways that cannot be measured in dollars.

For the ultimate result of a vote against this plan will be more human suffering.

This is a program for the very neediest of our state.

In bureaucratic language, there are those whose family incomes are below the federal poverty guidelines.

But what does that really mean?

It means \$4500 for two people to live on.

These aren't people getting fat on government handouts.

These are real people who urgently need our help.

Many of them are elderly who could not have planned for these skyrocketing costs of energy in their retirement years.

Yet these are the people who are most susceptible to illness stemming from being cold.

Many are children who are likewise subject to illness if not living in adequately heated homes.

The other major appropriation in our bill will enable the state to speed up its program for winterizing the homes of the needy.

This section reflects our recognition that there can be no substitute for conservation if we are ever to respond effectively to the new realities about energy.

Our appropriation amounts to \$1.1 million for the labor needed to use insulation materials being made available by the federal government.

If this legislation is passed, we will be able to weatherize another 5800 homes by next summer.

There will still be many thousands more to weatherize.

But 5800 additional homes will be using less fuel out of a limited statewide supply and costing their owners much less to heat.

Winterization is an excellent investment.

Every gallon of oil that is saved is just as valuable as every gallon found.

I know the question that is uppermost in your minds is that of the state's ability to pay for this program.

I know from the many productive meetings I have had with leadership and individual members that you all understand the desperate needs of

the elderly, our working poor, and others of our lowest-income citizens.

I know that, whatever other differences may exist, you speak with one voice in your determination to see no Maine person freeze this winter.

But many of you have spoken to me about state government's ability to fund this program.

Let me assure you, we can afford to fund our emergency program at the levels I have recommended.

First, while revenues suffered setbacks during the summer—due primarily to the gasoline shortage—the preliminary figures for September indicate that last month's revenues will be higher than estimated.

I can say to you that we can reasonably expect the money to be available to fund this and other necessary programs.

Let me add that, even if revenues were to fall off again, we must fund this program and pare expenses elsewhere.

For there can be no higher priority for state government than ensuring the health and safety of our people.

And the total cost of my package amounts to less than one-half of one per cent of our annual budget.

We have a moral obligation to meet the basic needs of our people.

Finally, I appreciate that we live in an era when many of our citizens are having a difficult time making ends meet.

I appreciate that there is a popular skepticism, and sometimes indeed cynicism, about human services programs.

But at the same time, I rarely meet a person who is not willing to support individuals in need—be they elderly or the very young.

This apparent contradiction is much like the low regard people generally have for government and politicians.

But at the same time, the same people have a very high regard for their own individual senator or representative, and I believe justifiably so.

What I am asking you to do is put aside the popular myths and skepticism against a class of people, and support the real live individual young and old in need who we must help.