

CHAPTER 11

AN ACT concerning the administration of the low-income home energy assistance benefits program and supplementing Title 52 of the Revised Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

C.52:27D-9.4 Schedule, toll-free telephone number, online application, established, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, receipt of benefits.

1. a. The Department of Community Affairs shall establish a schedule of days and hours of operation, a toll-free telephone number, and a downloadable application on its Internet website to facilitate the receipt of benefits under the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, established pursuant to 42 U.S.C. s.8621 et seq. Within six months following the effective date of P.L.2023, c.11 (C.52:27D-9.4), the department shall make available all application materials for the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, including the downloadable application required under this subsection, in each of the five most commonly spoken languages in the State, as determined by the department.

b. The department shall prepare and annually update a handbook containing the governing policies and eligibility requirements for the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. The department shall annually distribute copies of the handbook and its updates to each agency designated by the department to obtain, review, and process applications for benefits under that program.

c. The department shall adopt training sessions regarding the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program that cover subjects including, but not limited to, enrollment procedures, eligibility requirements, and fraud detection. The training sessions shall be provided on a quarterly basis and open to any agency that obtains, reviews, and processes applications under that program.

d. (1) Each director, manager, supervisor, and employee of an agency that obtains, reviews, and processes Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program applications, including any person who performs or supervises such program work, shall read the annually updated handbooks distributed by the department pursuant to subsection b. of this section and shall comply with the policies and procedures set forth therein for the applicable year.

(2) Each supervisor of an agency that obtains, reviews, and processes Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program applications, including any person who supervises such program work, shall attend the quarterly training sessions provided by the department pursuant to subsection c. of this section.

e. The department shall establish an open and competitive process, utilizing an annual request for proposal to be developed and issued by the department, to award grants to qualified nonprofit organizations to serve as agencies that obtain, review, and process Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program applications. The annual request for proposal developed and issued by the department pursuant to this subsection shall detail the necessary qualifications that a qualified nonprofit organization is required to meet to serve as an agency that obtains, reviews, and processes Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program applications. The annual request for proposal shall be fully compliant with federal laws and regulations and subject to final approval by the Director of the Division of Housing and Community Resources in the department.

For the purposes of this subsection, “qualified nonprofit organization” means a New Jersey-based organization that is incorporated, organized, and operated in such a manner as to qualify as a nonprofit corporation described in section 501(c)(3) of the federal Internal Revenue Code (26 U.S.C. s.501(c)(3)).

f. The department may disqualify an agency from serving as an agency that obtains, reviews, and processes Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program applications for failure to substantially comply with the requirements of subsection d. of this section.

g. The Commissioner of Community Affairs shall promulgate rules and regulations, pursuant to the "Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), in order to effectuate the provisions of this act.

2. This act shall take effect immediately.

Approved February 6, 2023.