

SENATE HEALTH, HUMAN SERVICES AND SENIOR CITIZENS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 2487

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MARCH 9, 2021

The Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee reports favorably and with committee amendments Senate Bill No. 2487.

As amended by the committee, this bill establishes in the Department of Human Services a burial assistance program for individuals, whose loved ones have died as a result of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in thousands of deaths in New Jersey over a short period of time and has caused myriad economic hardships, including business closures and job losses. These factors make unexpected burial costs more burdensome for some individuals, especially those with low income.

This bill requires the Commissioner of Human Services to establish a program to provide burial assistance for qualifying funeral expenses to New Jersey residents. The commissioner will determine eligible funeral expenses, establish a maximum amount of assistance per applicant, and devise a formula for the distribution of an amount of program funds to each applicant based on household income and need. This bill also directs the commissioner to identify amounts of federal government assistance provided to this State for COVID-19 relief that can be allocated to this program.

In order to qualify for this program, the applicant is required to be a New Jersey resident; file for a death attributed to COVID-19; and incur eligible funeral expenses not covered by other sources. As amended by the bill, the applicant will also provide to the Department of Human Services the following documentation: an official death certificate or a signed statement from a local, territorial, or tribal (SLLT) government licensed medical officer attributing the death to COVID-19; an itemized funeral bill, any funeral receipts, and a funeral contract indicating the applicant incurred or will incur eligible funeral expenses; documentation of burial insurance and any forms of funeral assistance received from other sources; information and documentation regarding the applicant's available household assets

and income as of the date of the death; and proof of New Jersey residency.

The bill appropriates \$20 million to the “2020 New Jersey Burial Assistance Program” in the Department of Human Services for the purposes of implementing the bill. This amount will first be funded using any available federal assistance given to the State, to the extent not prohibited by federal law, with balance of the appropriation to be drawn from the General Fund. The bill will take effect immediately and expire one year following end of both the state of emergency and public health emergency declared in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS

The committee amendments replace the term “crisis” with the term “pandemic.”

The committee amendments make a change to the bill’s title and effective date to clarify that it will implement a temporary measure.

The committee amendments make a number of technical changes involving syntax.