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**HOUSE BILL NO. 1692**

Offered January 10, 2007

Prefiled December 12, 2006

A *BILL to amend and reenact § 63.2-805 of the Code of Virginia, relating to the Home Energy Assistance Program.*

Patrons—Kilgore, Hurt and Marshall, D.W.

Referred to Committee on Health, Welfare and Institutions

**Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:****1. That § 63.2-805 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:**

§ 63.2-805. Home Energy Assistance Program; report; survey.

A. The General Assembly declares that it is the policy of this Commonwealth to support the efforts of public agencies, private utility service providers, and charitable and community groups seeking to assist low-income Virginians in meeting their residential energy needs. To this end, the Department is designated as the state agency responsible for coordinating state efforts in this regard.

B. There is hereby created in the state treasury a special nonreverting fund to be known as the Home Energy Assistance Fund, hereinafter the "Fund." Moneys in the Fund shall be used to:

1. Supplement the assistance provided through the Department's administration of the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program Block Grant; and

2. Assist the Commonwealth in maximizing the amount of federal funds available under the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program and the Weatherization Assistance Program by providing funds to comply with fund - matching requirements, and by means of leveraging in accordance with the rules set by the Home Energy Assistance Program.

The Fund shall be established on the books of the Comptroller. The Fund shall consist of donations and contributions to the Fund and such moneys as shall be appropriated by the General Assembly. Interest earned on money in the Fund shall remain in the Fund and be credited to it. Any moneys remaining in the Fund, including interest thereon, at the end of each fiscal year shall not revert to the general fund but shall remain in the Fund. Moneys in the Fund shall be used solely for the purposes set forth in this section. The State Treasurer shall make expenditures and disbursements from the Fund on warrants issued by the Comptroller upon written request signed by the Commissioner. Up to twelve percent of the Fund may be used to pay the Department's expenses in administering the Home Energy Assistance Program.

C. The Department shall establish and operate the Home Energy Assistance Program. In administering the Home Energy Assistance Program, it shall be the responsibility of the Department to:

1. Administer distributions from the Fund;

2. Lead and facilitate meetings with the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy, and other agencies of the Commonwealth, as well as any nonstate programs that elect to participate in the Home Energy Assistance Program, for the purpose of sharing information directed at alleviating the seasonal energy needs of low-income Virginians, including needs for weatherization assistance services;

3. Collect and analyze data regarding the amounts of energy assistance provided through the Department, categorized by fuel type in order to identify the unmet need for energy assistance in the Commonwealth;

4. Develop and maintain a statewide list of available private and governmental resources for low-income Virginians in need of energy assistance; and

5. Report annually to the Governor and the General Assembly on or before October 1 of each year *through October 1, 2007, and biennially thereafter*, on the effectiveness of low-income energy assistance programs in meeting the needs of low-income Virginians. In preparing the ~~annual~~ report, the Department shall:

a. Conduct a survey biennially beginning in 2002 that shall collect information regarding the extent to which the Commonwealth's efforts in assisting low-income Virginians are adequate and are not duplicative of similar services provided by utility services providers, charitable organizations and local governments;

b. Obtain information on energy programs in other states; and

c. Obtain necessary information from the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy, and other agencies of the Commonwealth, as well as any nonstate programs that elect to participate in the Home Energy Assistance Program, to complete the

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HB1692

59 biennial survey and to compile the required annual report. The Department of Housing and Community  
60 Development, the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy, and other agencies of the Commonwealth,  
61 as well as any nonstate programs that elect to participate in the Home Energy Assistance Program, shall  
62 provide the necessary information to the Department.

63 ~~The Department's annual reporting requirement shall cease October 1, 2007.~~

64 The Department is authorized to assume responsibility for administering all or any portion of any  
65 private, voluntary low-income energy assistance program upon the application of the administrator  
66 thereof, on such terms as the Department and such administrator shall agree and in accordance with  
67 applicable law and regulations. If the Department assumes administrative responsibility for administering  
68 such a voluntary program, it is authorized to receive funds collected through such voluntary program  
69 and distribute them through the Fund.

70 D. Local departments may, to the extent that funds are available, promote interagency cooperation at  
71 the local level by providing technical assistance, data collection and service delivery.

72 E. Subject to Board regulations and to the availability of state or private funds for low-income  
73 households in need of energy assistance, the Department is authorized to:

74 1. Receive state and private funds for such services; and

75 2. Disburse funds to state agencies, and vendors of energy services, to provide energy assistance  
76 programs for low-income households.

77 F. Actions of the Department relating to the review, allocation and awarding of benefits and grants  
78 shall be exempt from the provisions of Article 3 (§ 2.2-4018 et seq.) and Article 4 (§ 2.2-4024 et seq.)  
79 of Chapter 40 of the Administrative Process Act (§ 2.2-4000 et seq.).

80 G. No employee or former employee of the Department shall divulge any information acquired by  
81 him in the performance of his duties with respect to the income or assistance eligibility of any  
82 individual or household obtained in the course of administering the Home Energy Assistance Program,  
83 except in accordance with proper judicial order. The provisions of this section shall not apply to (i) acts  
84 performed or words spoken or published in the line of duty under law; (ii) inquiries and investigations  
85 to obtain information as to the implementation of this chapter by a duly constituted committee of the  
86 General Assembly, or when such inquiry or investigation is relevant to its study, provided that any such  
87 information shall be privileged; or (iii) the publication of statistics so classified as to prevent the  
88 identification of any individual or household.