

# ASSEMBLY APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

## STATEMENT TO

### ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR **ASSEMBLY, Nos. 3096 and 4049**

with committee amendments

# **STATE OF NEW JERSEY**

DATED: JANUARY 28, 2019

The Assembly Appropriations Committee reports favorably an Assembly Committee Substitute for Assembly Bill Nos. 3096 and 4049, with committee amendments.

As amended and reported, this bill requires that unclaimed property deposits from an electric or gas public utility (utility) in the Unclaimed Utility Deposits Trust Fund (trust fund) be paid to a Statewide nonprofit energy assistance organization (assistance organization) meeting certain criteria. Under the bill, in order to be eligible to receive trust fund monies, an assistance organization designated by the Board of Public Utilities (BPU) is required to: 1) have a network of no less than 200 partner organizations that collectively have a physical presence in every county in this State, providing secure, online or in-person grant application access; 2) have a board of directors comprised of not less than five utility representatives; and 3) have an on-site customer service call center providing access to assistance offered in a minimum of 150 languages. Within 10 months after the trust fund administrator disburses grant monies to the assistance organization designated by the BPU, and annually thereafter, the assistance organization is to issue a report to the BPU providing the number of applicants applying for household utility assistance grants, the number of households receiving utility assistance grants, the average amount of assistance provided to households, the average gross income of households receiving assistance, the methods and procedures used for the verification of household income or hardship, and any other information the BPU requires.

Further, the bill provides that for the State fiscal year starting on July 1, 2018, the BPU is to dedicate \$25 million from available balances collected through the societal benefits charge to provide grants to help pay the utility bills of households seeking temporary assistance from an assistance organization having the same qualifications required for payments of the trust fund as described above. Within one year after the BPU completes the disbursement of grant monies to the assistance organization, the assistance organization

is to issue a report to the BPU providing the same information, as is also required in the annual report required for the receipt of payments from the trust fund as described above.

As amended and reported, Assembly Bill Nos. 3096 and 4049 (ACS) is identical to Senate Bill No. 2129 (SCS), which was also amended and reported by the committee on this date.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amended the bill to require: 1) the assistance organization's network partner organizations collectively have a physical presence in every county in this State; and 2) the assistance organization to issue a report to the BPU 10 months after receiving unclaimed property deposits from the trust fund. The amendments delay by one year the effective date of section 2 of the bill.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Office of Legislative Services (OLS) determines that this bill will reallocate \$25 million in State resources from dedicated Board of Public Utilities (BPU) accounts that receive their funding from the Societal Benefits Charge (SBC) to a non-profit organization for the administration of a utility bill assistance grant program.

The OLS assumes that absent this bill the \$25 million would be spent on the purposes of each dedicated account in either FY 2020 or in a subsequent fiscal year. The OLS assumes further that the bill will not alter SBC rates because SBC-funded BPU program accounts are anticipated to carry FY 2020 year-end closing balances greater than \$25 million.