

HB 3125 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Action Date: 03/14/23

Action: Do pass and be referred to Ways and Means by prior reference

Vote: 7-1-1-0

Yeas: 7 - Boice, Gamba, Hartman, Helm, Levy B, McLain, Owens

Nays: 1 - Marsh

Exc: 1 - Scharf

Fiscal: Fiscal impact issued

Revenue: No revenue impact

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Meeting Dates: 2/9, 2/14, 3/14

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Establishes the Public Drinking Water and Sewer Ratepayer Assistance Fund (Fund). Directs Oregon Housing and Community Services Department (Department) to provide grants from fund moneys to qualified organizations to distribute water and sewer bill payment assistance to low-income residential households. Directs the Department to adopt rules for the administration and implementation of Fund distribution. Appropriates \$15 million General Fund moneys to the assistance program.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- History of ratepayer assistance program
- Connection between the measure and water bills that are bundled with rent
- Necessity of a continuing funding source
- Responsibility and accountability of utility companies

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

Public drinking water and sewer rates are determined by private- and public-owned water utility companies. In 2020 and 2021, Congress appropriated \$14 million of federal funding to Oregon to assist low-income individuals with paying utilities via the Coronavirus Relief Fund and the American Rescue Plan Act. The funds were dispensed through the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department and are not anticipated to be renewed.

House Bill 3125 establishes the Public Drinking Water and Sewer Ratepayer Assistance Fund, appropriates \$15 million General Fund moneys to the fund, and directs the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department to establish a grant program to fund qualified organizations to distribute water and sewer bill payment assistance to low-income residential households.