

Virginia Regulatory Town Hall Agency Background Document Proposed Regulation

Agency Name: Virginia Department of Social Services
VAC Number: 22 VAC 40-680-10 and 20
Regulation Title: Virginia Energy Assistance Program
Action Title: Amendment
Date: 08/18/99

Summary:

The proposed regulation will eliminate the requirement for verification of resources for Energy Assistance applicants and remove the resource reference from definitions.

The goal of LIHEA is to assist low-income households, particularly those with the lowest incomes, that pay a high proportion of household income for home energy, primarily in meeting their immediate home energy needs. Federal law does not impose a resource limit.

The Energy Assistance Program is a short-term seasonal program with limited administrative funds. The current regulation denies benefits to applicants with resources exceeding levels set by current Virginia program. The proposed regulation eliminates the resource limit and thus reduces the need for time-consuming verification of resources and eases applicant access to benefits.

Basis:

Pursuant to 63.1-25 of the Code of Virginia, the State Board of Social Services has authority to promulgate rules and regulations necessary for operation of all assistance programs. The Virginia Energy Assistance Program, funded by the Low Income Home Energy Assistance (LIHEA) Act, is a federal block grant with state flexibility. The proposed regulatory changes will modify the following areas: definitions and resources.

Purpose:

The goal of LIHEA is to assist low-income households, particularly those with the lowest incomes, that pay a high proportion of household income for home energy, primarily in meeting their immediate home energy needs. Federal law does not impose a resource limit.

The Energy Assistance Program is a short-term seasonal program with limited administrative funds. The current regulation denies benefits to applicants with resources exceeding levels set by the current Virginia program. The proposed regulation will eliminate the resource limit and thus reduce the need for time-consuming verification of resources and ease applicant access to benefits.

Substance:

The proposed change addresses the elimination of the requirement for verification of resources for Energy Assistance applicants and removes the resource reference from definitions.

Issues:

The primary advantage for the public of implementing the new regulatory provision is the ease of access to benefits thus eliminating delays in the application approval process. There are no known disadvantages to the public.

The new regulatory provision reduces the amount of time staff at the local departments of social services will spend processing a single application.

Alternatives:

The new regulatory provision that eliminates the resource limit offers a less burdensome and less intrusive alternative for both the public and the agency.

Public Comment:

No public comments were received during the NOIRA comment period.

Clarity of the Regulation:

The new regulatory provision eliminates the resource limit requirement and does not offer replacement language.

Periodic Review:

The agency will review the proposed regulation no later than three years after the effective date. The specific and measurable goals the proposed regulation is intended to achieve are easier applicant access to benefits, and reduction in the number of verifications and time required to process an application.

Fiscal Impacts:

The proposed change is expected to have no fiscal impact. The proposed change may result in an increase of applications but it is unlikely that any increase would be significant enough to reduce the current benefit for applicants. Even with an increase

applications local departments of social services will not be burdened with an increase of staff time. The shortened processing time created by the proposed change will balanced any increase in applications.