# Statewide Low-Income Monthly Residential Energy Bill Assistance Program Design Study Outline

1/26/2024

This document is a draft report outline for the Washington state Department of Commerce’s Statewide Low-Income Monthly Energy Bill Assistance Program Design study. Commerce is requesting feedback on this outline by Friday, Feb. 9, 2024. Feel free to mark up this draft with track changes and comments. You can submit your document with comments here: <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/3db737d911154db1956d20089b78516c>

**Executive summary**

* Overview
* Legislative mandate
* Key findings
* Recommendation
* Alternatives

**Methodology**

**Introduction**

* Key findings
* Background
  + The impact of energy burden on the lives of low-income households
    - Forgoing other basic necessities
    - Physical health impacts
    - Mental health impacts
    - Arrearages
    - Disconnections
  + Disproportionately impacted communities
    - Low-income households
    - Older adults
    - Disabled households
    - Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities
      * Tribes
    - Immigrants and refugees
    - Rural households
    - Renters
* Energy burden and assistance need in Washington
  + The rural utility dilemma
* Utility energy assistance programs
  + The existing utility-by-utility approach to energy assistance programs
    - Prevailing statutes
      * RCW 19.405.120 (Sec. 120)
      * RCW 80.28.068
    - Washington investor-owned utilities and their programs
    - Washington consumer-owned utilities and their programs
    - Utility energy assistance program participation rates
* Federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
* Other statewide energy assistance programs

**The standalone statewide monthly energy bill assistance program approach**

* Key findings
* Background
* Elements of program accessibility
  + Eligibility
    - Income thresholds
    - Categorical eligibility
    - Immigration status
    - Low-Income Home Energy Assistance status
    - Other non-income eligibility requirements
  + Application
    - Requirements
    - Income documentation
    - Utility bill documentation
    - Other required documentation
  + Enrollment
    - Online enrollment
      * + A welcoming and accessible door
        + Self-service and additional support features

Online access for notices

Document uploaders

Live chat

Language accessibility

Guest enrollment

* + - In-person enrollment
    - Phone enrollment
    - Mail-in application
    - Integrated benefits application
  + Household identification
    - Benefits Verification System (BVS)
    - Data Sharing
    - Confidentiality, Privacy, and Security
    - Fraud and abuse prevention
  + Program partnerships
    - State family partnerships
      * Washington State Equity Office
      * Department of Commerce
      * Health and Human Services Coalition
        + Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS)
        + Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)
        + Washington State Health Care Authority
        + Washington State Department of Health
        + Washington Health Benefit Exchange
    - Local partners
  + Program outreach
    - Program branding
    - Contracts with local service providers
    - Grants with local service providers
    - Utility outreach
    - Multilingual program outreach
* Elements of program deliverability
  + On-bill assistance mechanism
    - Percentage discount
    - Tiered percentage discount based on income
    - Personalized discount based on energy burden
    - Bill credits for propane and other fuel costs
  + Depositing money on utility accounts
* Program administration
  + DSHS
  + Commerce
* Funding
  + Climate Commitment Act Accounts
  + System benefits charge
  + State General Fund

**Data and Technology Based Approaches, i.e. the data clearinghouse model**

* Key findings
* Background
* Data sharing between state low-income programs and utility programs
  + Can utilities or community partners receive lists of state low-income program enrollees?
  + Can utilities or community partners crosscheck a list of households in a utility service territory with a list of state low-income program enrollees?
* Benefits of a data clearinghouse model
* The drawbacks and limitations of a data clearinghouse model

**Policy Layering and Supplementary Funding Approaches**

* Key findings
* Background
* Supplementary funding for the Heat and Eat Program
* Monthly checks directly to households
* Supplementing LIHEAP
* Supplementary funding for utility programs
  + State General Fund and Climate Commitment Account
  + Revenue threshold approach discussed in 2023 Low-Income Energy Assistance Report
* Additional legislative requirements for utilities

Maintaining the status quo

* Key findings
* Background
* The case for no legislative changes
* The drawbacks and limitations of making no legislative changes

Conclusion