

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.B. 981
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AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

S.B. 981 allows vertically integrated electric utilities, municipally owned utilities, retail electricity providers, and electric cooperatives to establish an electricity discount program for military veterans who have significantly decreased ability to regulate their body temperature because of severe burns received in combat.

The bill also requires the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUC) to compile a list of the discount programs offered by retail electricity providers to military veterans with severe burns and for that list to be posted on the PUC website.

As proposed, S.B. 981 amends current law relating to electric utility bill payment assistance programs for certain veterans burned in combat.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Public Utility Commission of Texas in SECTION 3 (Section 39.259, Utilities Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 1502.056, Government Code, by amending Subsection (a) and adding Subsections (a-1) and (a-2), to read as follows:

(a) Creates a new Subsection (a-1) from existing text of this subsection. Makes no further changes to this subsection.

(a-1) Creates this subsection from existing text. Provides that for a municipality with a population of more than one million but less than two million, the first lien against the revenue of a municipally owned utility system that secures the payment of public securities issued or obligations incurred under this chapter also applies to funding, as a necessary operations expense, for a bill payment assistance program for utility system customers who have been threatened with disconnection from service for nonpayment of bills and who have been determined by the municipality to be low-income customers.

(a-2) Provides that the first lien against the revenue of a municipally owned electric utility system, including a system to which Subsection (a-1) applies, that secures the payment of public securities issued or obligations incurred under this chapter also applies to funding, as a necessary operations expense, for a bill payment assistance program for the electric utility system's customers who are military veterans who have significantly decreased abilities to regulate their bodies core temperatures because of severe burns received in combat.

SECTION 2. Amends Section 36.061, Utilities Code, by adding Subsection (c), as follows:

(c) Authorizes an electric utility located in a portion of this state not subject to retail competition to establish a bill payment assistance program for a customer who is a military veteran who a medical doctor certifies has a significantly decreased ability to regulate the individual's body temperature because of severe burns received in combat.

Requires a regulatory authority to allow as a cost or expense a cost or expense of the bill payment assistance program. Provides that the electric utility is entitled to fully recover all costs and expenses related to the bill payment assistance program; defer each cost or expense related to the bill payment assistance program not explicitly included in base rates; and apply carrying charges at the utility's weighted average cost of capital to the extent related to the bill payment assistance program.

SECTION 3. Amends Subchapter H, Chapter 39, Utilities Code, by adding Section 39.359, as follows:

Sec. 39.359. BILL PAYMENT ASSISTANCE FOR BURNED VETERANS. (a) Authorizes a retail electric provider to establish a bill payment assistance program for a customer who is a military veteran who a medical doctor certifies has a significantly decreased ability to regulate the individual's body temperature because of severe burns received in combat.

(b) Requires the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUC) to compile a list of programs described by Subsection (a) that are available from retail electric providers. Requires PUC to publish the list on PUC's Internet website and requires the Office of Public Utility Counsel (OPUC) to provide on OPUC's Internet website a link to the list.

(c) Requires a retail electric provider to provide to PUC information necessary to compile the list in the form, manner, and frequency PUC by rule requires.

SECTION 4. Amends Chapter 182, Utilities Code, by adding Subchapter D, as follows:

SUBCHAPTER D. BILL PAYMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
FOR BURNED VICTIMS

Sec. 182.201. DEFINITIONS. Defines "electric cooperative" and "municipally owned utility" in this section.

Sec. 182.202. BURNED VETERANS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM. (a) Authorizes the board of directors of an electric cooperative or the governing body of a municipally owned utility to establish a bill payment assistance program for a customer who is a military veteran who a medical doctor certifies has a significantly decreased ability to regulate the individual's body temperature because of severe burns received in combat.

(b) Provides that the costs of a bill payment assistance program established under Subsection (a) are considered a necessary operations expense.

(c) Authorizes the board of directors of an electric cooperative or the governing body of a municipally owned utility to determine the method to fund a bill payment assistance program established under Subsection (a).

SECTION 5. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2013.