

1 S.257

2 Introduced by Senator Sears

3 Referred to Committee on

4 Date:

5 Subject: Utilities; electric; natural gas; energy assistance programs; ratepayer
6 funding; tax deductions

7 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to prohibit the
8 Public Service Board from establishing a low-income energy assistance
9 program funded by ineligible ratepayers on a mandatory basis. Rather, it
10 makes ratepayer funding of such a program voluntary and tax deductible.

11 An act relating to energy assistance program fees

12 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

13 * * * Electric Energy Assistance Program * * *

14 Sec. 1. 30 V.S.A. § 218(e) is amended to read:

15 (e) Notwithstanding any other provisions of this section, the Board, on its
16 own motion or upon petition of any person, may issue an order approving a
17 rate schedule, tariff, agreement, contract, or settlement that provides reduced
18 rates for ~~low-income~~ low-income electric utility consumers better to assure
19 affordability. ~~For the purposes of~~ As used in this subsection, “~~low-income~~
20 low-income electric utility consumer” means a customer who has a household

1 income at or below 150 percent of the current federal poverty level. When
2 considering whether to approve a rate schedule, tariff, agreement, contract, or
3 settlement for ~~low income~~ low-income electric utility consumers, the Board
4 shall take into account the potential impact on, and cost-shifting to, other
5 utility customers. The Board's order shall ensure that ineligible utility
6 customers are not required to fund any program authorized under this
7 subsection. Such funding shall be voluntary only.

8 * * * Natural Gas Energy Assistance Program * * *

9 Sec. 2. 33 V.S.A. § 2607(g) is amended to read:

10 (g)(1) The Public Service Board shall require natural gas suppliers subject
11 to regulation under 30 V.S.A § 203 to provide a discount program to customers
12 with incomes no greater than 200 percent of the federal poverty level or who
13 meet the Department for Children and Families' means test of eligibility for
14 LIHEAP crisis fuel assistance. Eligibility for the discount shall be verified by
15 the Department for Children and Families.

16 (2) In implementing the discount program, the Board shall consider:

17 (A) ~~Low income~~ low-income discount programs, rates, and cost
18 structures of other Vermont regulated utilities;

19 (B) ~~Low income~~ low-income discount programs, rates, and cost
20 structures for gas customers in other states;

1 (C) ~~Options~~ options for allocating the costs of the discount program
2 that avoid or reduce the cost impact of the program on ineligible ratepayers,
3 including consideration of each of the following:

4 (i) ~~Use~~ use of any revenues collected from ratepayers that are in
5 excess of the revenue requirement most recently determined by the Board;

6 (ii) ~~Use~~ use of revenues collected from ratepayers to fund system
7 expansions that have not been placed in service.

8 (3) The Board shall not require ineligible ratepayers to fund the discount
9 program authorized under this subsection. Such funding shall be voluntary
10 only.

11 (4) On or before January 15, 2013, the Board shall:

12 (A) implement this subsection by order to each natural gas company
13 subject to its jurisdiction; and

14 (B) report to the House Committees on Commerce and Economic
15 Development and on Human Services, and to the Senate Committees on Health
16 and Welfare and on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs on
17 its implementation of this subsection, including its consideration of the matters
18 described in subdivision (2) of this subsection and the results of that
19 consideration.

