

The City of Seattle
Ordinance 127489
Council Bill 121247

An ordinance relating to the City Light Department's emergency bill assistance program; amending Section 21.49.042 of the Seattle Municipal Code to adjust program terms and conditions and expand eligibility guidelines for emergency bill assistance.

Recitals:

Rising energy costs in Seattle and in Seattle City Light's franchise cities place a disproportionate strain on households with limited incomes.

Reducing energy burden for income constrained households is essential to fulfilling Seattle City Light's responsibility to maintain affordability, fairness, and equitable treatment for all customers.

The Washington State Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA), codified in chapter 19.405 RCW, directs electric utilities to identify and reduce the energy burden on income constrained households and to demonstrate measurable progress toward meeting the energy assistance needs of customers earning up to 80 percent of area median income.

Seattle Municipal Code Section 21.49.042 authorizes an emergency low income bill

assistance program through which eligible City Light residential customers may receive a credit toward their electric bill.

In 2025 the Emergency Bill Assistance Program supported nearly 6,000 City Light customers by providing approximately \$4.2 million in emergency bill assistance, and tailoring emergency bill assistance to a household's billed amount ensures support that reflects actual energy burden and accommodates annual rate changes.

The May 2026 response to Statement of Legislative Intent SPU-12S-A from Seattle Public Utilities, Seattle City Light, and the Seattle Human Services Department recommended expanding access to emergency assistance by increasing income eligibility to 80 percent of area median income and allowing eligible households to receive the maximum credit regardless of household composition.

Aligning eligibility criteria across City utility assistance programs will improve clarity, equity, and ease of access for customers.

The Mayor and City Council seek to expand access to emergency utility assistance for customers struggling to pay their electric bills. Therefore,

Be it ordained by The City of Seattle as follows:

Section 1. Section 21.49.042 of the Seattle Municipal Code, last amended by Ordinance 126584, is amended as follows:

21.49.042 - Emergency Bill Assistance Program

A. An emergency credit ((of up to 100 percent of a customer's delinquent bills not to exceed a maximum credit as provided in subsection 21.49.042.C)) may be granted

by the Department to income-eligible residential electric consumption accounts, metered for a single household that qualify under the following criteria:

1. Total household income does not exceed 80 percent of the ~~((Washington State))~~ area median income for the number of individuals in the household as computed annually by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Multifamily Tax Subsidy Projects (MTSP) Income Limits for the Seattle-Bellevue, WA Metro Fair Market Rent Area; and

2. A customer has ~~((Have))~~ completed any Department program application where income eligibility is verified; and

3. A customer has ~~((Have received a ten-day notice))~~ a consumption account balance the customer is unable to pay or has received an Urgent Notice of Final Shut Off Notice from the Department notifying them that payment or a payment plan ~~((payment arrangements))~~ must be made to prevent disconnection ~~((or have a past due balance greater than \$250 on an active service agreement))~~ .

B. Eligible customers may receive an emergency credit amount not to exceed the greater of the total of the customer's two bi-monthly bill amounts (billed every other month) or last four monthly amounts (billed monthly) or the maximum annual benefit established in Department rules pursuant to Chapter 3.02. This credit can only be applied to offset current or future consumption bills. The Department is authorized to establish rules pursuant to Chapter 3.02 establishing the maximum annual benefit and procedures for allocating.

~~((B. A customer is eligible for the emergency credit once each calendar year, or twice each calendar year if the household includes at least one minor child.))~~

~~((C. In 2022 and subsequent years, the maximum credit of \$500 shall be adjusted annually by the Department to reflect the average change in electric bills for residential customers.))~~

C.~~((D.))~~ The Department may, at its discretion, require a payment plan for the unpaid balance as a condition of receiving emergency assistance under the program.

~~((E. Until December 31, 2023, households qualifying under subsection 21.49.042.A who do not have minor children in the household may receive a second emergency assistance credit within the same calendar year, notwithstanding anything in subsection 21.49.042.B.~~

~~F. For customers eligible to receive two credits in one calendar year, the Department, at its discretion, may grant one credit exceeding the maximum single credit amount under subsection 21.49.042.C so long as the total amount credited to a customer during a calendar year does not exceed two times the single maximum credit.))~~

Section 2. Section 1 of this ordinance shall take effect on January 1, 2027.

This ordinance shall take effect as provided by Seattle Municipal Code Sections
1.04.020 and 1.04.070.

Passed by the City Council and signed in open session in authentication of its
passage on August 4, 2026.



President _____ of the City Council

Approved _____ on August 11, 2026.



Katie B. Wilson, Mayor

Attested on August 11, 2026.



Scheereen Dedman, City Clerk

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