

The City of Seattle
Ordinance 127490
Council Bill 121246

An ordinance relating to emergency assistance for Seattle Public Utilities customers; amending Section 21.76.065 of the Seattle Municipal Code to adjust program terms and conditions and expand eligibility guidelines for emergency bill assistance.

Recitals:

Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) Section 21.76.065 establishes the Emergency Assistance Program (EAP) for low-income customers of Seattle Public Utilities (SPU).

SMC Section 21.76.065 determines an SPU customer is eligible for EAP if the total household income of all household members does not exceed 80 percent of the Washington State median income for the number of individuals living in the household.

SMC Section 21.76.065 provides twice as much emergency bill payment assistance to SPU customers who have minor children in the household than to customers without minors in the household.

SPU charges are more closely related to the number of people in a household than to the minor-status of those in the household.

Seattle is experiencing a severe and accelerating affordability crisis driven by skyrocketing housing, childcare, healthcare, and basic living costs.

The May 2026 response to Statement of Legislative Intent SPU-12S-A from SPU, Seattle City Light (SCL), and Seattle Department of Human Services (HSD) contains recommendations to expand access to emergency assistance by increasing income eligibility to 80 percent of area median income and to allow eligible households access to the maximum amount of credit regardless of household composition.

There is a need to establish consistent eligibility and assistance guidelines across the various City utility assistance programs.

The Mayor and City Council wish to expand access to emergency assistance to more customers who may be struggling to pay their utility bills and align the SCL and SPU programs. Therefore,

Be it ordained by The City of Seattle as follows:

Section 1. Section 21.76.065 of the Seattle Municipal Code, last amended by Ordinance 126585, is amended as follows:

21.76.065 Low income emergency assistance program

A. Qualification. Upon satisfactory proof, emergency assistance shall be issued to each household for which a member of the household is billed, by Seattle Public Utilities (SPU), for water, wastewater, or solid waste services and has annual income that, when combined with the annual income of all household members, 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 ~~((state or the City))~~ United States Department of Housing and Urban Development in the Multifamily Tax Subsidy

Projects Income Limits for the Seattle-Bellevue, WA Metro Fair Market Rent Area.

SPU may, at its discretion, require a payment plan for the unpaid balance as a condition of receiving emergency assistance under this program.

B. Application. Applicants shall provide the information required by the Human Services Department or SPU, on forms and in the manner determined by the Human Services Department or SPU.

C. Emergency credit. Customers with individually metered SPU residential accounts(~~((, metered for a single family residence,))~~) and determined by the Human Services Department or SPU to be eligible under subsection 21.76.065.A, shall receive an emergency credit (~~((of 100 percent of the customer's delinquent bills))~~) up to a maximum credit defined in subsection 21.76.065.D(~~((, but may only receive such credit once each calendar year unless a minor child lives with the customer. When a minor child lives in the household, the customer may receive an emergency credit twice each calendar year))~~) .

D. Maximum credit defined. (~~((In 2022 and subsequent years, the maximum amount of \$477))~~) SPU is authorized to establish rules pursuant to Chapter 3.02 establishing the maximum annual credit. The maximum credit amount shall be based on average SPU charges for four months of service and shall be adjusted annually by SPU to reflect the average growth in combined water, sewer, and solid waste bills for residential customers.

E. SPU is authorized and directed to administer the program, including establishing rules pursuant to Chapter 3.02, and entering into cooperative agreements with the Human Services Department, to carry out the program's intent and purpose.

~~((SPU may, at its discretion, require a payment plan for the unpaid balance as a condition of receiving emergency assistance under this program.~~

~~F. Temporary COVID-19 assistance. Until December 31, 2023, households qualifying under subsection 21.76.065.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 21.76.065.C.~~

~~G. 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 21.76.065.D 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. This ordinance shall take effect on January 1, 2027.

SPU Emergency Assistance ORD
Leslie Brinson/Brian Goodnight
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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

Seal