

CHAPTER 258

AN ACT concerning the modification and rehabilitation of housing for certain veterans, supplementing chapter 27D of Title 52 of the Revised Statutes, and making an appropriation.

BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

C.52:27D-516 Short title.

1. This act shall be known and may be cited as the “New Jersey Housing Assistance for Veterans Act.”

C.52:27D-517 Definitions relative to housing for certain veterans.

2. As used in this act:

“Director” means the Director of the Division of Housing and Community Resources in the Department of Community Affairs.

“Disabled” means a person who fulfills the definition of having a “disability” pursuant to section 3 of the “Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990,” 42 U.S.C. s.12102.

“Division” means the Division of Housing and Community Resources in the Department of Community Affairs.

“Eligible veteran” means a disabled or low-income veteran.

“Energy efficient features or equipment” means features or equipment within a primary residence that help to reduce the amount of electricity used to heat, cool, or ventilate the residence, including but not limited to insulation, weatherstripping, air sealing, repaired heating systems, or duct sealing.

“Family member” means a spouse, child, parent, sibling, aunt, uncle, niece, nephew, first cousin, grandparent, grandchild, father-in-law, mother-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, stepparent, stepchild, stepbrother, stepsister, half brother, or half sister, whether the individual is related by blood, marriage, or adoption.

“Low-income veteran” means a veteran occupying a household with a gross household income equal to 50 percent or less of the median gross household income for households of the same size, and within the same housing region, as defined by subsection b. of section 4 of P.L.1985, c.222 (C.52:27D-304).

“Primary residence” means a dwelling unit that is owned by the eligible veteran or by a family member of the eligible veteran, and occupied by the eligible veteran as his or her principal residence.

“Qualified organization” means a nonprofit veterans' organization that qualifies as a section 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(19) tax exempt organization under the Internal Revenue Code.

“Veteran” means any resident of the State who has been honorably discharged or released under honorable circumstances from active service in any branch of the armed forces of the United States, or any honorably discharged member of the American Merchant Marine who served during World War II and is declared by the United States Department of Defense to be eligible for federal veterans' benefits.

C.52:27D-518 Pilot program.

3. The director shall establish a pilot program to award grants to qualified organizations to rehabilitate and modify the primary residences of eligible veterans, and shall manage the pilot program in consultation with the Adjutant General of the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs to most effectively advance the needs of eligible veterans. The director shall administer the pilot program for five years following the operative date of P.L.2017,

c.258 (C.52:27D-516 et seq.). Grant awards totaling \$1 million shall be awarded during each year the pilot program is in operation.

a. In addition to any additional information required by the director, a qualified organization seeking a grant under the pilot program shall submit an application to the division that shall include the following information:

(1) the approximate number of veterans the qualified organization has the capacity to serve through grant funding; and

(2) a description of the type of work to be completed, such as interior home modifications, energy efficiency improvements, and other similar categories of work.

b. In order to receive a grant award under the pilot program, a qualified organization shall:

(1) demonstrate expertise in providing housing rehabilitation and modification services for the purpose of making homes accessible, functional, and safe;

(2) have experience in successfully carrying out accountability and reporting requirements involved in the proper administration of grant funds; and

(3) commit to paying workers employed through the pilot program no less than the prevailing wage rate for the worker's craft or trade, as determined by the Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development pursuant to P.L.1963, c.150 (C.34:11-56.25 et seq.).

c. In awarding grants under the pilot program, the director shall give preference to qualified organizations that employ workers from an apprenticeable trade participating in the Helmets to Hardhats Program, as certified by the New Jersey State Building and Construction Trades Council, such that not less than five percent of projected labor hours shall be completed by such participating organizations.

d. Low income veterans who are also disabled shall receive preference over other eligible veterans in selection for assistance under the pilot program.

e. Grant awards under the pilot program shall be used to modify and rehabilitate the primary residences of eligible veterans, and for other purposes necessary to advance this goal, as permitted by the director. Permitted uses of grant funding shall include, but shall not be limited to:

(1) installing wheelchair ramps, widening exterior and interior doors, reconfiguring and re-equipping bathrooms to enhance accessibility, removing doorway thresholds, and installing appropriate floor coverings to accommodate the functional limitations that result from having a disability;

(2) rehabilitating homes that are in a state of interior or exterior disrepair; and

(3) installing energy efficient features or equipment if the eligible veteran's monthly residential utility costs are greater than five percent of monthly household income, and an energy audit of the residence indicates that the installation of energy efficient features or equipment would reduce utility costs by 10 percent or more.

f. No qualified organization shall be awarded more than \$400,000 through the pilot program in any one fiscal year. A qualified organization receiving a grant shall contribute a matching contribution in an amount not less than 50 percent of the grant award. This matching requirement may be met through cash contributions, or in-kind contributions, as permitted by the director. Eligible veterans benefitting from the pilot program shall not pay an application fee or any other cost for the work completed on their residence, unless a modest fee can be charged, as permitted by the director, without forcing the veteran's total monthly housing costs to exceed 30 percent of total household income.

g. (1) The director shall provide an annual report to the Governor, and the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), presenting the following information with respect to the associated year of the pilot program:

- (a) the number of eligible veterans provided assistance under the pilot program;
- (b) the socioeconomic characteristics of the benefited veterans;
- (c) the total number, types, and locations of qualified organizations offered grant funding under the pilot program;
- (d) the amount of matching funds, and form of in-kind contributions raised with each grant;
- (e) a description of the housing rehabilitation and modification services provided, costs saved, and actions taken under the pilot program;
- (f) a description of the outreach initiatives implemented to educate the general public and qualified organizations about the pilot program, and to identify eligible veterans and their families; and
- (g) a description of compensation offered to workers employed through the pilot program, and a certification that workers have not been paid less than the prevailing wage rate for the worker's craft or trade, as determined by the Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development pursuant to P.L.1963, c.150 (C.34:11-56.25 et seq.).
- (h) any other information that the director considers relevant in assessing the pilot program.

(2) Not later than six months following completion of the pilot program, the director shall provide another report to the Governor, and the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), presenting information necessary to assess the success of the pilot program as a whole.

C.52:27D-519 Rules, regulations.

4. The Director of the Division of Local Government Services in the Department of Community Affairs shall promulgate rules and regulations, pursuant to the "Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), to effectuate the provisions of P.L.2017, c.258 (C.52:27D-516 et seq.), on or before the first day of the fifth month next following enactment.

5. There is appropriated from the General Fund the sum of \$5 million to the Division of Local Government Services in the Department of Community Affairs for the purposes of effectuating the provisions of this act.

6. This act shall take effect immediately, but sections 1 through 3 shall remain inoperative until the first day of the fifth month next following enactment.

Approved January 8, 2018.