Summary and Fiscal Note

1. Legislation Summary

Department: Seattle City Light

Title: 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.

Background: This legislation amends the terms of the Emergency Bill Assistance (EBA) Program, which is operated by Seattle City Light (SCL). The bill is effective April 10, 2027.

City Light provides financial assistance to income-eligible residential customers through three different programs: an ongoing bill discount through the Utility Discount Program and annual emergency financial assistance through the EBA Program and through the community-funded Project Share program. In 2025, the EBA Program provided $4.2M in financial assistance to nearly 6,000 City Light customers. In order to better serve income-eligible residential customers' needs and to be responsive to the Clean Energy Transformation Act, City Light proposes legislative changes to expand income-eligibility criteria, tailor the emergency assistance benefit, and reduce barriers to qualify. This legislation changes the criteria as follows:

- **Expand Income Eligibility:** Currently, applicants' income must not exceed 80 percent of the Washington State median income. This legislation changes the income threshold to 80 percent of area median income. This income eligibility expansion increases the estimated number of eligible households from 137,000 to approximately 200,000.

- **Tailor Benefit Amount:** Currently, income-eligible households without children may receive up to $710 per year in emergency financial assistance and households with children may receive up to $1,420 per year. This legislation tailors the annual maximum benefit for all households to not exceed the greater of the total of the customer's past two bi-monthly bill amounts (every other month) or last four monthly amounts (if billed monthly) or the maximum annual benefit established in Department rules pursuant to Chapter 3.02 ($1,420 per year in 2027).
- **Reduce Barriers to Qualify:** Currently, applicants must have a past-due balance of $250 or have received an urgent or final shutoff notice to qualify for emergency assistance. This legislation reduces barriers to qualify by eliminating the $250 past due balance requirement. Customers may request emergency assistance if they are unable to pay their current or past due residential consumption electric bill (including if they have received an urgent or final shutoff notice).

In 2025, the EBA Program provided $4.2M in financial assistance to nearly 6,000 City Light customers. This legislation may add up to an additional 12,000 customers and provide an estimated $3M in additional benefits (expressed in the budget as reduced revenues). This cost is estimated using an EBA program participation rate assumption of 9%, which is a higher estimate than EBA's historical enrollment average of around 4%.

SPU has a similar program for emergency assistance to serve income eligible customers. This SCL legislation aligns with SPU's legislation to expand income eligibility to 80% AMI.

Summary Attachments:

N/A

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2. Capital Improvement Program (CIP)

Does this legislation create, fund, or amend a CIP Project?

☐ Yes

☒ No

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3. Summary of Financial Implications

Does this legislation have financial impacts to the City?

☒ Yes

☐ No

a. Expenditure Change to Other Funds

2026	2027 est.	2028 est.	2029 est.	2030 est.
$0	$750,000	$905,000	$905,000	$905,000

b. Revenue Change to Other Funds

2026	2027 est.	2028 est.	2029 est.	2030 est.
$0	($3,000,000)	($3,000,000)	($3,000,000)	($3,000,000)

c. Number of Positions

2026	2027 est.	2028 est.	2029 est.	2030 est.
0	2	1	0	0

d. Total Full-Time Employee (FTE) Change

2026	2027 est.	2028 est.	2029 est.	2030 est.
0	2	1	0	0

3b. Revenues/Reimbursements

This legislation adds, changes, or deletes revenues or reimbursements.

Anticipated Revenue/Reimbursement Resulting from This Legislation:

Fund Name and Number	**Dept.**	**Revenue Source**	**2026 Revenue**	**2027 Estimated Revenue**
41000 Light Fund	SCL	Electric Service	$0	$(3,000,000)

Total 2026 Revenue	**Total 2027 Estimated Revenue**
$0	$(3,000,000)

Revenue/Reimbursement Notes:

3c. Positions

This legislation does not add, change, or delete positions. However, because this legislation expands an existing program, positions are anticipated to be added in the future budget actions as follows:

2027: 2 FTEs Program Intake Representative

2028: 1 FTE Program Intake Representative

3d. Other Financial Impacts

a. Does this legislation create any other financial impacts for The City of Seattle, such as direct or indirect costs, one-time or ongoing, that aren't mentioned above? If yes, please explain these impacts.

No.

b. If the legislation has costs that can be covered within the current budget, explain how. Does the department have extra resources in its budget to handle these costs? Or does the department need to shift resources away from other work to handle these costs?

City Light's proposed strategic plan and rate path have incorporated the changes that will be made by this legislation. Any needed adjustments to appropriations, revenues, and positions will be included in future budget actions.

c. What financial costs or other impacts might happen if this legislation is not implemented?

This legislation provides relief to SCL customers that are unable to pay their utility bill. If this legislation is not adopted, the status quo will remain, and the expanded pool of eligible customers would not have access to this assistance program. In addition, SCL would not be compliant with Washington State law related to serving low-income customers as defined by the Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA) as customer with annual household incomes up to 80% Area Median Income (AMI).

d. How might this legislation affect other City departments besides the one that proposed it?

No.

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4. Other Impacts

a. Does this legislation require a public hearing?

☐ Yes

☒ No

b. Does this legislation require a notice to be published in The Daily Journal of Commerce and/or The Seattle Times?

☐ Yes

☒ No

c. Does this legislation affect a piece of property?

No.

d. Race and Social Justice Initiative impacts:

1. How does this legislation affect vulnerable or historically disadvantaged communities? How did you come to this conclusion? Please consider both impacts within City government (like employees and internal programs) and in the broader community.

Seattle City Light's Emergency Bill Assistance Program provides support to lower-income households by providing financial assistance to help income-eligible customers who are unable to pay their current or past due electricity bill and are at risk of service disconnection for non-payment. This program serves communities historically furthest from economic justice and aligns with serving highly impacted communities and vulnerable populations as identified as part of Washington State's Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA).

2. Please attach any Racial Equity Toolkits or other racial equity analyses used to develop or assess this legislation.

Seattle City Light is evaluating its overdue receivables in an intentional way, comparing delinquencies at the census tract level with American Community Survey/Census income and language data.

3. What is the Language Access Plan for communicating with the public about this legislation?

Utility assistance program income eligibility expansion includes a comprehensive communications plan for serving multilingual customers.

e. Climate change impacts:

1. Emissions: Will this legislation significantly increase or decrease carbon emissions? Attach any studies or materials that inform your answer.

No.

2. Resiliency: Will this legislation make Seattle more or less able to adapt to climate change? If it reduces resiliency, explain what can be done to lessen the impact.

This legislation will increase City Light customer's resiliency as part of the Washington State Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA) law to mitigate energy burden related to the transition to clean energy by offering utility assistance for income eligible customers defined as low income up to 80% Area Median Income (AMI).

f. If this legislation creates a new program or expands an existing one, what are the long-term, measurable goals? How will this legislation help achieve those goals? What methods will be used to track progress?

The goal is to assist income-eligible households who struggle to pay their electric bills and reduce the number of income eligible households who impacted by service disconnection for delinquent debt. This progress is tracked using tableau reporting showing increase in program participation across City Light's service area.

g. Does this legislation create a non-utility CIP that involves shared funding with a non-City partner or organization?

No.