

[(3) Any employee of the Office who is eligible for transfer to the State Personnel Management System and who has held this position for at least 6 months shall be so transferred without further probation, examination, or qualification. An employee transferred to the State Personnel Management System pursuant to this subsection shall be transferred in the respective job classification under which the employee is employed at the time of transfer and shall not receive any diminution in compensation or respective amounts of accumulated leave or sick leave, solely as a result of this transfer.]

(d) In the performance of its duties, the Office is authorized and empowered to make and enter into contracts and to assume those functions necessary to carry out the provisions of this subheading that are not inconsistent with this or other acts. The Office may make and enter into contracts [with other boards, commissions, agencies, and institutions of this State, other states and the federal government, upon such terms as may be eventually agreed upon,] to have such studies and research activities as may be necessary and proper, and is authorized to pay the cost thereof out of funds which may be appropriated to the Office.

6-406.

The Office [of Economic Opportunity] shall develop and implement the following programs:

(1) An emergency energy crisis intervention program to prevent low income households~~†~~, including the near poor, the elderly, AND HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN and those on fixed incomes~~‡~~ from experiencing danger to health or survival as a result of [a utility disconnection or a lack of fuel] AN ENERGY EMERGENCY. The Office shall establish intake procedures for those experiencing an energy emergency and guidelines for the income eligibility and the program eligibility of applicants. [Local offices for administering] THE OFFICE SHALL IDENTIFY LOCAL PUBLIC OR PRIVATE AGENCIES TO ADMINISTER the crisis intervention program [shall be identified by the Energy Assistance and Information Office]. [An emergency fund shall be established to pay] THE OFFICE SHALL MAKE PAYMENTS TO fuel and utility vendors who have provided service to persons qualifying for the crisis intervention program. ~~‡The amount of assistance shall be based on need, with a maximum of \$250 per year to any qualifying household. Where possible, all existing assistance programs concerned with energy emergencies shall be administered by the Maryland Office of Economic Opportunity.‡~~

(2) [A] ONE OR MORE fuel and utility assistance [program] PROGRAMS to make payments on behalf of qualified households in order to defray fuel and utility costs. [Program] THE OFFICE SHALL DETERMINE PROGRAM and income eligibility guidelines [are determined by the coordinator]. The amount of assistance shall be based on need~~‡~~.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect October 1, 2005.

Approved April 26, 2005.