SYNOPSIS
Authorizes grants to purchase and rehabilitate abandoned homes for homeless veterans.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT
As introduced.
AN ACT authorizing grants to purchase and rehabilitate abandoned homes for homeless veterans and amending P.L.2017, c.258.

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

1. Section 2 of P.L.2017, c.258 (C.52:27D-517) is amended to read as follows:
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" "Disability" means [a person who fulfills the definition of having a "disability"] the same as that term is defined 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 who is low-income or has a disability, or both.
   "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.
   "Homeless veteran" means a veteran who is living outside, or in a building not meant for human habitation or which the veteran has no legal right to occupy, in an emergency shelter, or in a temporary housing program which may include a transitional and supportive housing program if habitation time limits exist, or temporarily in the home of another household, or in a motel.
   "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.

EXPLANATION – Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets [thus] in the above bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted in the law.

Matter underlined thus is new matter.
"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.

"Rehabilitation" means the repair, renovation, alteration, or reconstruction of any building or structure.

"Veteran" means any resident of the State now or hereafter who has been discharged honorably or under general honorable conditions in any branch of the Armed Forces of the United States, or a Reserve component thereof, or the National Guard of this State or another state as defined in section 1 of P.L.1963, c.109 (C.38A:1-1), 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 (cf: P.L.2019, c.500, s.12.)

2. Section 3 of P.L.2017, c.258 (C.52:27D-518) is amended to read as follows:

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 to purchase and rehabilitate abandoned homes for occupancy by homeless veterans. The director 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,

(1) the director shall give preference to:

(a) 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; and

(b) qualified organizations that serve communities that the director determines have the greatest need for homeless services; and

(2) the director may give preference to qualified organizations to achieve a fair distribution, as determined by the director, among homeless veterans in different geographical regions.

d. Low income veterans who [are] also [disabled] have a disability 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, to purchase and rehabilitate abandoned homes, including homes that have been foreclosed, and for other purposes necessary to advance [this goal] these goals, 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, reconfigurating and re-equipmenting 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.
(cf: P.L.2017, c.258, s.3)

3. This act shall take effect immediately.

STATEMENT

This bill would amend the “New Jersey Housing Assistance for
Veterans Act,” P.L.2017, c.258 (C.52:27D-516 et seq.) to expand
the purposes of the pilot program established by that act to include
the purchase and rehabilitation of abandoned homes for homeless
veterans. Currently, the pilot program established by this law
authorizes grants to eligible nonprofit organizations to rehabilitate
existing primary residences of disabled or low-income veterans.
Under the bill, a nonprofit veterans' organization that has experience in rehabilitating housing for homeless veterans, or others, would be eligible to receive a grant to purchase and rehabilitate abandoned homes for homeless veterans. The bill would afford a preference in awarding grants to nonprofit organizations that serve communities that are in the greatest need of homeless services. The bill would allow the administrator of the current pilot program to give preferences in awarding grants in order to achieve a fair distribution among homeless veterans in different geographical regions of the State.

Finally, this bill adjusts the existing law, through defining “rehabilitation” and other language changes, to clarify that pilot program funds may be expended for a broad range of project types, including repairs, renovations, reconstruction, as well as the installation of appropriate new fixtures and other alterations.