
Introduced Pending Technical Review by Legislative Counsel.
AN ACT establishing the “2020 New Jersey Burial Assistance Program” and making a $20 million appropriation.

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

1. a. There is established in the Department of Human Services the “2020 New Jersey Burial Assistance Program” for the purpose of providing financial assistance to individuals to cover eligible funeral expenses related to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic.
   b. The Commissioner of Human Services shall administer this program and adopt, pursuant to the “Administrative Procedure Act,” P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1), rules and regulations to implement this program. The commissioner shall determine eligible funeral expenses, establish a maximum amount of assistance per applicant, and devise a formula for the distribution of an amount of program funds to each applicant based on household income and need.
   c. In order to qualify for this program, an applicant shall comply with the following conditions of eligibility:
      (1) the applicant is a New Jersey resident;
      (2) the applicant is filing for a death that a state, local, territorial, or tribal (SLTT) government licensed medical official has attributed to COVID-19;
      (3) the applicant incurred or will incur eligible funeral expenses, not covered by other sources such as burial insurance or financial assistance from voluntary agencies, applicable government programs, or other entities; and
      (4) the applicant provides to the Department of Human Services the following documentation:
         (a) an official death certificate or a signed statement from a SLTT government licensed medical officer attributing the death to COVID-19;
         (b) an itemized funeral bill, any funeral receipts, and a funeral contract signed by the funeral director, indicating the applicant incurred or will incur eligible funeral expenses;
         (c) documentation of burial insurance and any forms of funeral assistance received from voluntary agencies, government agencies, charities, or other entities;
         (d) information and documentation regarding the applicant’s available household assets and income as of the date of the death; and
         (e) proof of New Jersey residency.
   d. The commissioner shall identify amounts of federal government assistance provided to this State for COVID-19 emergency relief, which can be allocated to this program.

2. There is appropriated to the Department of Human Services the sum of $20 million to be credited to the “2020 New Jersey...
Burial Assistance Program” to effectuate the provisions of P.L. , c. (C. ) (pending before the Legislature as this bill). The amounts appropriated herein shall be funded first from assistance provided from the federal government to the extent not prohibited by federal law. The remaining amounts necessary to fund this program are appropriated from the General Fund.

3. This act shall take effect immediately and shall expire one year following the end of both the state of emergency and public health emergency declared in response to the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic.

STATEMENT

This bill establishes in the Department of Human Services a burial assistance program for individuals, whose loved ones have died as a result of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in thousands of deaths in New Jersey over a short period of time and has caused myriad economic hardships, including business closures and job losses. These factors make unexpected burial costs more burdensome for some individuals, especially those with low income.

This bill requires the Commissioner of Human Services to establish a program to provide burial assistance for qualifying funeral expenses to New Jersey residents. The commissioner will determine eligible funeral expenses, establish a maximum amount of assistance per applicant, and devise a formula for the distribution of an amount of program funds to each applicant based on household income and need. This bill also directs the commissioner to identify amounts of federal government assistance provided to this State for COVID-19 relief that can be allocated to this program.

In order to qualify for this program, the applicant is required to be a New Jersey resident; file for a death attributed to COVID-19; and incur eligible funeral expenses not covered by other sources. As amended by the bill, the applicant will also provide to the Department of Human Services the following documentation: an official death certificate or a signed statement from a local, territorial, or tribal (SLLT) government licensed medical officer attributing the death to COVID-19; an itemized funeral bill, any funeral receipts, and a funeral contract indicating the applicant incurred or will incur eligible funeral expenses; documentation of burial insurance and any forms of funeral assistance received from other sources; information and documentation regarding the applicant’s available household assets and income as of the date of the death; and proof of New Jersey residency.
The bill appropriates $20 million to the “2020 New Jersey Burial Assistance Program” in the Department of Human Services for the purposes of implementing the bill. This amount will first be funded using any available federal assistance given to the State, to the extent not prohibited by federal law, with balance of the appropriation to be drawn from the General Fund. The bill will take effect immediately and expire one year following end of both the state of emergency and public health emergency declared in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.