
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 2531 Session of
2022

INTRODUCED BY KIRKLAND, HOHENSTEIN, HILL-EVANS, SCHLOSSBERG,
PARKER, SANCHEZ, DELLOSO, KINSEY, MADDEN, T. DAVIS, O'MARA,
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BRADFORD, CURRY, HANBIDGE, McNEILL, OTTEN, GUZMAN, GUENST,
DALEY, FRANKEL AND A. DAVIS, APRIL 22, 2022

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON FINANCE, APRIL 22, 2022

AN ACT

1 Establishing the Pennsylvania Opportunity Program and the
2 Pennsylvania Opportunity Program Fund; imposing duties on the
3 Treasury Department; and imposing penalties.

4 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
5 hereby enacts as follows:

6 Section 1. Short title.

7 This act shall be known and may be cited as the Pennsylvania
8 Opportunity Program Act.

9 Section 2. Definitions.

10 The following words and phrases when used in this act shall
11 have the meanings given to them in this section unless the
12 context clearly indicates otherwise:

13 "Department." The Treasury Department of the Commonwealth.

14 "Eligible individual." An individual who:

- 15 (1) Resides in this Commonwealth.
16 (2) Is at least 18 years of age.
17 (3) Has a household income of \$80,000 or less.

1 (4) Is eligible to receive an opportunity payment.

2 "Household income." All income received by an individual and
3 the individual's spouse during the prior calendar year.

4 "Income." As follows:

5 (1) All income from whatever source derived, including:

6 (i) Salaries, wages, bonuses and incentive payments,
7 whether based on profits or otherwise, commissions, fees,
8 tips, income from self-employment, alimony, support
9 money, cash public assistance and relief.

10 (ii) The gross amount of any pensions or annuities
11 and 50% of railroad retirement benefits.

12 (iii) Fifty percent of all benefits received under
13 the Social Security Act (49 Stat. 620, 42 U.S.C. § 301 et
14 seq.), except Medicare benefits.

15 (iv) All interest received from the Federal
16 Government, any state government or any instrumentality
17 or political subdivision thereof.

18 (v) Realized capital gains and rentals.

19 (vi) Workers' compensation.

20 (vii) The gross amount of loss-of-time insurance
21 benefits, life insurance benefits and proceeds, except
22 the first \$5,000 of the total of death benefit payments.

23 (viii) Gifts of cash or property, other than
24 transfers by gift between members of a household, in
25 excess of a total value of \$300.

26 (2) The term does not include surplus food or other
27 relief in kind supplied by a governmental agency or nonprofit
28 organization, property tax or rent rebate, inflation
29 dividend, Federal veterans' disability payments or State
30 veterans' benefits.

1 "Opportunity payment." A one-time payment made in accordance
2 with section 4 to an eligible individual.

3 Section 3. Pennsylvania Opportunity Program.

4 The Pennsylvania Opportunity Program is established within
5 the department to provide opportunity payments to eligible
6 individuals in accordance with this act.

7 Section 4. Opportunity payments.

8 (a) Eligible expenses.--The department shall provide a one-
9 time opportunity payment to an eligible individual for costs
10 incurred by the eligible individual that are related to the
11 COVID-19 pandemic, including:

12 (1) Child care or after-school care.

13 (2) Education or workforce training to support career
14 development.

15 (3) Rental assistance, mortgage assistance or housing
16 repairs.

17 (4) Transportation, including car payments, gasoline and
18 transit fares.

19 (5) Utility assistance, including broadband.

20 (6) Health care, including health insurance premiums,
21 medical bills and copayments.

22 (7) Other expenses related to the COVID-19 pandemic as
23 determined by the department and included in guidelines
24 developed under section 7.

25 (b) Deemed eligible.--Costs incurred for any expense under
26 subsection (a) shall be deemed an expense related to the COVID-
27 19 pandemic if incurred for the period beginning March 6, 2020,
28 and ending one year after receipt of an opportunity payment.

29 (c) Limitations.--

30 (1) Only one eligible individual per household may

1 receive an opportunity payment. The following apply:

2 (i) For purposes of this paragraph, a household
3 includes an individual, the spouse of the individual and
4 any dependent of the individual.

5 (ii) The limitation under this paragraph does not
6 apply to unrelated individuals living together.

7 (2) An eligible individual may receive an opportunity
8 payment not exceeding \$2,000 as follows:

9 (i) If the eligible individual's household income is
10 \$50,000 or less, the amount of the opportunity payment
11 shall be \$2,000.

12 (ii) If the eligible individual's household income
13 is more than \$50,000 and \$80,000 or less, the amount of
14 the opportunity payment shall be \$1,500.

15 (d) Exemption.--An opportunity payment shall be exempt from
16 taxation for State and local purposes and may not be considered
17 as income when determining eligibility for needs-based
18 assistance, unless prohibited under Federal law.

19 Section 5. Application.

20 (a) Development of forms.--The department shall develop a
21 form for individuals to apply to the department for an
22 opportunity payment. The form shall be posted on the publicly
23 accessible Internet website of the department.

24 (b) Contents of application.--A completed application under
25 this section must include:

26 (1) The name, address, telephone number and other
27 contact information of the applicant.

28 (2) The composition of the applicant's household.

29 (3) Proof of eligibility for an opportunity payment,
30 including proof of household income.

1 (4) An attestation that an opportunity payment shall be
2 used for eligible expenses specified under section 4(a). The
3 attestation shall include an acknowledgment that the
4 department may audit individuals. The department may require
5 any additional documentation to confirm that payments were
6 used to cover eligible expenses.

7 (c) Process.--

8 (1) The department shall develop an application process,
9 including deadlines, for applicants to apply for an
10 opportunity payment.

11 (2) The department shall begin to accept applications
12 from eligible applicants no later than 60 days after the
13 effective date of this subsection.

14 (3) The department shall make opportunity payments to
15 individuals no later than 120 days after the effective date
16 of this subsection.

17 Section 6. Consultation.

18 The department may consult with the Department of Revenue or
19 other Commonwealth agencies to determine income eligibility
20 under this act.

21 Section 7. Guidelines.

22 (a) Development.--Within 30 days of the effective date of
23 this section, in consultation with the Department of Revenue and
24 the Department of Community and Economic Development, the
25 department shall develop guidelines necessary to implement this
26 act, including guidelines regarding:

27 (1) The application process.

28 (2) Eligibility requirements.

29 (3) Eligible expenses.

30 (b) Publication.--The guidelines shall be posted on the

1 department's publicly accessible Internet website at least 30
2 days before applications are accepted by the department.

3 Section 8. Funding.

4 (a) Establishment of fund.--The Pennsylvania Opportunity
5 Program Fund is established as a special fund within the State
6 Treasury to be used for making opportunity payments.

7 (b) Transfer.--In addition to any other money appropriated
8 to the department for making opportunity payments, the sum of
9 \$500,000,000 is transferred to the Pennsylvania Opportunity
10 Program Fund from money received by the Commonwealth under Title
11 IX, Subtitle M, section 9901 of the American Rescue Plan Act of
12 2021 (Public Law 117-2, 135 Stat. 4) and deposited into the
13 COVID-19 Response Restricted Account for the purpose of making
14 opportunity payments.

15 (c) Administrative costs.--The department may use up to
16 \$500,000 of the money specified under subsection (b) for
17 administrative costs to implement the Pennsylvania Opportunity
18 Program.

19 (d) Insufficient money.--If the amount under subsection (b)
20 is not sufficient to make opportunity payments to all eligible
21 individuals, the department shall make payments in a manner
22 determined by the department.

23 Section 9. Audits and fraudulent claims.

24 (a) Audits.--The department may consult with the Auditor
25 General on any audit necessary to ensure that the individual is
26 an eligible individual and that the payment was utilized for
27 eligible expenses.

28 (b) Civil penalty.--If an application under this act was
29 filed with fraudulent intent, the application shall be
30 disallowed in full.

1 (c) Criminal penalty.--An applicant, or any person who
2 knowingly assisted in the preparation of a fraudulent
3 application, commits a misdemeanor of the third degree and, upon
4 conviction, shall be sentenced to pay a fine not exceeding
5 \$2,000 or to imprisonment not exceeding one year, or both.
6 Section 10. Effective date.

7 This act shall take effect immediately.