



**H.B. 91**

124th General Assembly  
(As Introduced)

**Reps. Barnes, Patton, Sykes, Jones, Ford, Lendrum, S. Smith, Redfern, Key, D. Miller, Jerse, Woodard, DePiero, Boccieri, Carano, Strahorn, Cirelli**

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**BILL SUMMARY**

- Creates the People's Natural Gas Relief Initiative as a joint select legislative study committee.
- Requires the Initiative to report to the Governor and General Assembly on strategies for providing additional heating assistance to low-income residential consumers, as well as assistance to the general public and entrepreneurs, especially at times of rising natural gas prices.
- Declares an emergency.

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**CONTENT AND OPERATION**

**Joint legislative study committee on heating assistance strategies**

(Section 1)

**Duties of the committee**

The bill creates a joint legislative study committee called the People's Natural Gas Relief Initiative. The stated objective of the committee is to examine the current system of wholesale acquisition, storage, and retail distribution of natural gas and the volatility of retail natural gas prices, for the purposes of identifying, especially at times of rising natural gas prices, (1) strategies for providing additional heating assistance to low-income residential consumers and (2) strategies, important for stabilization and economic growth, for providing assistance to the general public and to entrepreneurs. The bill requires the committee to consider all forms of assistance, including assistance in paying natural gas bills, reducing the price of natural gas, and reducing the demand for natural gas. (Section 1(A).)

In identifying assistance strategies, the committee must consider (1) new sources of funding, (2) new ways of providing assistance or providing natural gas service, and (3) ways in which current federal and state heating assistance funds could be used more effectively and efficiently, including how funds could be leveraged to increase assistance or how they could be used through a linked-deposit or any other type of program to encourage governmental or community-based, off-season purchases of natural gas. The strategies also must identify any specific state legislative or administrative changes necessary to implement them.

The bill requires the committee to consider a wide range of perspectives and to solicit ideas, information, comment, and testimony from natural gas suppliers, consumers, including low-income consumers and senior citizens, local intake agencies, community-based organizations serving low-income consumers, entrepreneurs, and experts in energy efficiency. The Office of Consumers' Counsel, Public Utilities Commission, Department of Development, Department of Aging, and Department of Job and Family Services must cooperate with the committee in its study and provide the committee with reports and other information upon request to fulfill the committee's duties. The Legislative Service Commission also must provide fiscal and research staff for the committee. (Section 1(B).)

Under the bill, the committee must complete its examination and submit a report of its recommendations within 90 days after its first meeting. The report must be submitted to the Governor, the President and Minority Leader of the Senate, the Speaker and Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, and the committees of the House and Senate having primary jurisdiction over energy assistance. The bill provides that the committee ceases to exist upon the submission of the report. (Section 1(D).)

### **Composition and operation of the committee**

The committee is to consist of ten members: five members of the House of Representatives appointed by the Speaker, not more than three of whom are members of the majority party; and five members of the Senate appointed by the President of the Senate, not more than three of whom are of the majority party. Appointments must be made within ten days after the bill's effective date. The Speaker and President each must select one appointee to serve as co-chairs.

The committee must meet at the call of the co-chairs, but its first meeting must be convened within ten days after the date of the members' appointment to the committee. Any vacancy must be filled in the manner of the original appointment. The co-chairs have subpoena authority pursuant to existing legislative law (sec. 101.41) conferring that authority. (Section 1(C).)

**Emergency clause**

(Section 2)

The bill contains an emergency clause under which the bill will take immediate effect upon enactment. The stated reason for the emergency is to allow the state, at the earliest possible time, to address the vital need for assistance to low-income individuals, the general public, and entrepreneurs, given the relatively high level of natural gas prices in the current Ohio market.

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**HISTORY**

ACTION	DATE	JOURNAL ENTRY
Introduced	02-14-01	p. 156

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