By: Gutierrez S.B. No. 297

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to one-time emergency household economic relief payments in response to a statewide household affordability emergency; making an appropriation.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Title 4, Government Code, is amended by adding Chapter 405A to read as follows:

CHAPTER 405A. EMERGENCY HOUSEHOLD ECONOMIC RELIEF

Sec. 405A.001. PUBLIC CALAMITY; EMERGENCY FINDINGS. (a) The legislature finds that extraordinary and sustained increases in the cost of housing, electricity, food, transportation, insurance, and other necessities have created a statewide household affordability emergency that threatens the ability of Texas households to obtain necessities and maintain stable housing.

(b) The legislature declares that the statewide household affordability emergency described by Subsection (a) constitutes a public calamity for purposes of Section 51, Article III, Texas Constitution, and that the temporary aid provided under this chapter is intended to alleviate the immediate consequences of that calamity and protect the health, safety, and economic stability of residents of this state.

(c) The legislature finds that a uniform, one-time emergency household relief payment is necessary to provide prompt assistance without delaying relief through individualized

determinations of financial hardship. The payment does not create an entitlement to recurring benefits.

Sec. 405A.002. DEFINITIONS. In this chapter:

(1) "Comptroller" means the comptroller of public accounts.

(2) "Household" means one or more natural persons occupying a dwelling unit as their usual place of residence and sharing the dwelling unit as a residence, without regard to whether the occupants are related. The term includes an individual residing alone.

(3) "Qualified household" means a household with a usual place of residence in this state on January 1, 2027, represented by a person who is at least 18 years of age on that date, or an emancipated minor, and that satisfies the verification requirements adopted under this chapter.

(4) "Representative" means a natural person designated by the members of a qualified household to receive a payment on the household's behalf.

Sec. 405A.003. ONE-TIME EMERGENCY RELIEF PAYMENT. (a) Subject to this chapter, the comptroller shall make a single emergency household economic relief payment of $1,500 to each qualified household in this state.

(b) Not more than one payment may be made for a qualified household. A payment is for the benefit of the household as a whole and is not increased because the household has additional members.

(c) Eligibility for a payment may not be conditioned on the household's income, homeownership, property-tax liability,

employment, receipt of public benefits, or whether its members filed a state or federal income tax return.

(d) A payment under this chapter is not a loan and may not be required to be repaid except in the case of fraud or duplicate payment.

Sec. 405A.004. ADMINISTRATION; APPLICATION. (a) The comptroller shall establish a simplified procedure for determining household eligibility and issuing payments by electronic funds transfer, check, or another secure method selected by the recipient.

(b) The comptroller may use information lawfully available to the comptroller or another state agency to identify qualified households, but may not deny a household a payment solely because the household is not identified in an existing government database.

(c) The comptroller shall provide an accessible application method by mail and in person, in addition to any electronic method, and a reasonable procedure to correct errors, contest denial, and resolve conflicting claims by persons at the same address.

(d) A household may establish its usual residence by a lease, utility record, school record, government correspondence, sworn declaration, or other reasonably reliable evidence. The comptroller shall adopt rules addressing persons experiencing homelessness, residents of group quarters, and other households without a conventional street address.

(e) The comptroller shall take reasonable steps to prevent duplicate and fraudulent payments without imposing an unreasonable burden on eligible households.

Sec. 405A.005. PAYMENT SCHEDULE. (a) The comptroller shall begin issuing payments as soon as practicable after the effective date of this chapter and shall make reasonable efforts to issue payments to verified households not later than December 31, 2027.

(b) An application for a payment may be submitted until December 31, 2028. The comptroller shall continue to issue payments on timely applications until all properly payable claims have been resolved, subject to the appropriation made for this purpose.

Sec. 405A.006. INFORMATION; CONFIDENTIALITY. (a) Information obtained solely to verify household eligibility or transmit payment is confidential and not subject to public disclosure under Chapter 552, except for deidentified aggregate reports.

(b) The comptroller shall publish quarterly the number of households paid, the aggregate amount disbursed, administrative expenditures, and the estimated number of eligible households not yet paid.

Sec. 405A.007. RULES. The comptroller shall adopt rules necessary to implement this chapter. Rules may not impose an income limitation or reduce the $1,500 amount prescribed by Section 405A.003.

SECTION 2. (a) For the state fiscal biennium ending August 31, 2029, $17,000,000,000 is appropriated from the economic stabilization fund to the comptroller of public accounts for one-time emergency household economic relief payments and

administration of the program established by Chapter 405A, Government Code, as added by this Act, in response to the public calamity declared by Section 405A.001 of that chapter.

(b) The appropriation under this section is made pursuant to Section 49-g(m), Article III, Texas Constitution, and is contingent on approval by a vote of two-thirds of the members present in each house of the legislature. The legislature further declares that the emergency relief payments are intended as aid in a case of public calamity under Section 51, Article III, Texas Constitution.

(c) Of the money appropriated under Subsection (a) of this section, the comptroller may use not more than one percent for the costs of administering the payments.

(d) If the comptroller determines that the appropriation will be insufficient to make the full payment to each qualified household, the comptroller shall promptly report the estimated shortfall to the governor, lieutenant governor, speaker of the house of representatives, and Legislative Budget Board. This subsection does not authorize the comptroller to expend money in excess of the appropriation.

SECTION 3. The legislature finds that the statewide household affordability emergency requires prompt action. Not later than the 30th day after the effective date of this Act, the comptroller of public accounts shall adopt emergency rules and make available an application method for the payment program created by this Act.

SECTION 4. If any provision of this Act or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the invalidity does

not affect other provisions or applications that can be given effect without the invalid provision, and to this end the provisions of this Act are severable.

SECTION 5. This Act takes effect immediately if it receives a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this Act takes effect September 1, 2027.