§ 222. Senior citizen energy packaging pilot program. 1. (a) The legislature finds and declares that a significant percentage of the state's senior citizens live at or below the poverty level. In many cases, energy costs reach or exceed thirty percent of household income. These factors make energy conservation efforts on behalf of low income elderly crucial. The legislature further finds that energy conservation programs have been under-utilized by such citizens because of such factors as reduced mobility, social and physical isolation, and the complexity of the maze of services available.

(b) The legislature therefore declares that a pilot program to assist such citizens to conserve energy should be implemented by the office in conjunction with county offices for the aging. The legislature further declares that such a program will further the energy conservation objectives of the state and should be partially supported by petroleum overcharge restitution funds.

2. Within the amounts appropriated therefor, the office shall establish guidelines for and administer a senior citizen energy packaging pilot program to be carried out by county offices for the aging in the counties of Nassau, Suffolk, Broome, Erie, and Tompkins and such other counties as funds may allow. Wherever possible, such program shall be coordinated with appropriate existing programs of public utilities, the state energy office, and the department of state.

3. These appropriations shall be used specifically for the training of personnel within county offices for the aging to insure their thorough familiarity with state and federal energy conservation programs and benefits and their ability to facilitate receipt of such benefits by the client population. These appropriations shall also be used to provide salaries, appropriate benefits and expenses of such personnel in carrying out the purposes of the pilot program. Depending on the size of the client population to be served, no more than five of such personnel shall be trained and utilized in any county.

4. The client population shall consist of those senior citizens living at or below the poverty level. Whenever possible, priority shall be given to serving first those in greatest need of assistance, including

but not limited to, home energy assistance program recipients.