



Testimony on House Bill 2004
House Committee on Energy and Environment

State Representative Tina Kotek
April 4, 2013

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 2004.

During the 2011 Session, Representative McLane and I worked together on the House side to pass Senate Bill 863, which temporarily increased the amount of funds available for payment assistance for utility bills by allowing the Public Utility Commission (PUC) to collect through PGE and PacifiCorp an additional \$5 million from ratepayers over a 12-month period if certain economic triggers were met. At the time, we knew that many Oregonians were struggling to make ends meet and energy assistance was in short supply because of the increased need and a decrease in federal energy assistance dollars. The additional funds are currently set to sunset in January 2014.

While Oregon's and the nation's economy has improved over the last two years, too many families are still unemployed, underemployed, or facing shutoff notices due to other financial setbacks. We believe these additional dollars should be renewed for the biennium.

There is an amendment coming that will:

1. Extend the allowance for the PUC to collect an additional \$5 million each year of the biennium for low-income energy assistance for two years (changed from \$8 million).
2. Remove the economic triggers and allow the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department (OHCS) to make a request that monies be collected.
3. Sunset the bill in two years, at the end of the biennium.
4. Establish a committee that includes community action agencies, the Citizens Utility Board, PGE, PacifiCorp, and OHCS to develop a plan to present during the 2014 Session regarding transferring administration of the program from OHCS to another entity and the appropriate triggers for any future collection of money for this program.
5. Require a report to the appropriate interim committees on the progress of #4.

House Bill 2004 is a very concrete thing we can do this session to help the most vulnerable families in our state. We urge your support and a "do pass" recommendation.