



Testimony on House Bill 2004-A  
House Committee on Energy and Environment

State Representative Tina Kotek  
May 6, 2013

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

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.

HB 2004 as amended in the House does the following:

1. Extends the allowance for the PUC to collect an additional \$5 million each year of the biennium for low-income energy assistance for two years.
2. Removes the economic triggers and allows the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department (OHCS) to make a request that monies be collected.
3. Sunsets the bill in two years, at the end of the biennium.
4. Establishes 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 recommending 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.

A 2003 study conducted by OHCS found that a payment assistance program to low-income consumers helps individuals and families avoid a range of costs including bad debt and shutoff related costs. On average this can lead to \$340 in savings to customers and \$11 in savings per participant for the utility providing service. Cost savings related to the program equaled nearly half a million dollars for a single year.

House Bill 2004-A 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.