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**Scott Coe, General Manager
Emerald PUD
On behalf of the Oregon PUD Association**

Oregon PUDs Oppose HB 2599

Chair Fagan and Members of the Committee,

My name is Scott Coe and I am the General Manager of Emerald PUD. I am here on behalf of the Oregon People's Utility District Association (OPUDA). OPUDA's members include five People's Utility Districts (known as PUDs) which provide electric service to mostly rural Oregonians.

Oregon's PUDs collectively serve over 193,000 people and deliver over 4 million megawatt hours of electricity to Oregonians annually. OPUDA member utilities provided almost 400 family wage jobs in rural communities, representing more than \$46 million in salary and benefits.

Oregon PUDs pride ourselves on finding solutions that work well for both the customer and the utility. When a customer becomes eligible for disconnection we offer several options to prevent service interruptions. We work with each customer to understand their individual circumstances and then identify a reasonable payment plan. Disconnecting the power is truly a last resort for us.

Low-income bill payment assistance is available to PUD customers at or below 60% of the state median income. This includes access to the Federal LIHEAP benefits via local Community Action Agencies. In addition to the federal programs, PUDs offer their own low-income billing assistance programs. Columbia River PUD, for example, administers an emergency assistance program for low-income customers facing disconnection for nonpayment. This program, which is funded through customer contribution, scrap metal sales, and employee and community fundraising, has given over 1100 grants over the past two years.

PUDs employ tools including low-income weatherization to make homes more energy efficient, requiring less energy to operate, and consequently, reduced energy bills for customers. An example is a PUD program that provides 100% payment for qualifying home weatherization measures including insulation, heating systems, windows, and replacement roofs for manufactured homes. Homes may be owner-occupied or rental, site built or manufactured.

PUDs prefer to partner with our customers to identify reasonable options that will help them get their account back into good standing. At Emerald PUD, for example, we regularly extend payment plans up to 60 days from the date of the bill. If a customer is unable to establish a reasonable payment plan we offer the option to enroll in our Prepaid Billing program. This program allows us to refund a customer's deposit to reduce their balance owing as well as roll the remaining account balance into an arrangement. For each payment the customer makes towards their Prepaid account, a small percentage is applied to the past due arrangement. This allows

Central Lincoln PUD – Newport

Columbia River PUD – St. Helens

Emerald PUD – Eugene

Northern Wasco County PUD – The Dalles

Tillamook PUD - Tillamook

customers to build up their prepaid credit and work towards paying off their past due balance. In extreme circumstances we will offer a customer an installment plan if we are unable to identify a reasonable payment plan or enroll them into the Prepaid Billing program. This option prevents the customer from continuing to report past due or from receiving delinquency notices. Instead, the customer's billing statement will include charges for current energy consumption and a line item for one installment payment.

We also educate our customers on energy assistance options. We partner with several agencies throughout our service territory to help customers with their financial needs. We recommend specific agencies and energy assistance programs based on the information the customer provides us. Most programs just offer financial assistance but we do have a program in-house that also provides energy consumption and conservation education. This program is designed to help customers pay down their past due balance and teach them how to understand and control their energy consumption moving forward. If for any reason the customer is unable or unwilling to utilize one of these payment options or receive energy assistance payments, we will reluctantly move forward with disconnecting the power.

There is extensive outreach to customers prior to disconnection. To give an example, written notice is provided at least 15 days prior to disconnection and final notice is sent via US mail 5 days prior to disconnection. Additionally, customers are notified by telephone and/or field visit is made leaving door hanger the day before disconnection. And, the PUD attempts to reach the customer by telephone on the day of disconnection.

PUDs have programs in place to ensure that disconnections do not occur during inclement weather and holidays. For example, there are no disconnections when the expected average daily temperature is not expected to be above freezing, or when the daytime high temperature is expected to be in the high 90's or exceed 100 degrees. There are no disconnections on the day prior to a weekend or PUD recognized holiday (office closure).

Finally, PUDs have extremely low write-off rates, below 1%. Low write-off amounts are a result of working diligently with customers to keep bills current while at the same time making and enforcing payment arrangements.

Thank you for your time.