

**Testimony to the House Committee on Energy and Environment
2016 Oregon House Bill 4036
Clean Electricity and Coal Transition Plan
February 1, 2016**

Dear Chair Vega Pederson, Vice Chairs Reardon and Johnson, and House Interim Committee on Energy and Environment:

Formed in 2001, the Coalition of Communities of Color is an alliance of 19 culturally-specific community based organizations with representation from six communities of color: African, African American, Asian and Pacific Islander, Latino, Native American and Slavic.

We are a diverse coalition of community leaders, organizers, direct service providers, and racial justice advocates that represent a broad cross section of communities in Oregon who have been underserved by the state's political representation and social services. The communities the CCC and our member organizations serve often face poverty, high unemployment, housing instability, and unequal access to social services and institutions. We write today because we know that on top of the many barriers our members confront every day, the ill effects of pollution and climate change hit our communities first and most severely. That is why we support HB 4036, a legislative proposal that would rid Oregon of coal-fired power and replace it with clean, renewable energy.

Coal fired power plants pose a serious public health risk, releasing dangerous toxins and chemicals in the air exposing those who live and work around them to increased risk of asthma, heart failure, lung disease and other associated illnesses. Nationally, African Americans are far more likely to reside near coal plants, and Native Americans experience higher rates of asthma than other racial and ethnic groups.

Furthermore, we know that in addition to being bad for our health and our environment, coal presents an economic risk of increased costs for consumers. At the same time, renewable energy sources continue to drop in price as technology becomes more sophisticated and is scaled up. We represent community members who struggle day-to-day to afford housing, feed their families, and pay for daily expenses. HB 4036 will provide more affordable electricity rates over the long-term by making this shift to clean, renewable energy from coal-based energy. However, we also seek to ensure that there are tangible benefits to our communities as utilities invest in cleaner infrastructure.

Currently, a utility could conceivably comply with the renewable requirement by building or buying from low-cost resources anywhere in the West using bundled Renewable Energy Credits (RECs). An additional target for acquisition of smaller-scale projects as well as job creation in OR, and in disadvantaged communities, would ensure that there is direct benefit. An amendment would still just be the first step in a path towards including environmental justice in state energy policy. Many other states have implemented both in-state requirements and equity goals for their RPS. Since there is an existing 4% rate impact ceiling to protect customers, we advocate for projects that deliver in-state benefits, not just lowest costs.



HB 4036 includes a commitment to launching a community solar program and specifically ensures that 15% of the program will be made available to low-income communities. While ultimately we want more low-income households to benefit from community solar and a guaranteed commitment to how much community solar power is developed, we see this as an important start to this program. We must ensure the input and governance of underserved communities in the determination of communities that are targeted for low-income support. It is also unclear what mechanism ensures that these customers receive benefit, as “made available” is not very strong. Direct goals for community management, job-creation and localization of projects in disadvantaged communities would help ensure an equitable distribution of benefits.

Communities of color and low-income households are disproportionately located along high traffic corridors, resulting in disproportionate exposure to toxic air contaminants or criteria air pollutants and related health impacts. Increased electric vehicle infrastructure is essential to reducing pollution from cars. Currently, the intent language suggests increased access to EV infrastructure for low and moderate income communities; however, the implementation language fails to address these goals or objectives, and there is no mechanism in the bill to ensure the benefit to low and moderate income customers. We expect amendments and future legislation to include this.

Finally, changing the PUC directive to include “least cost, least risk, greatest equity” in planning would be a fundamental shift in the way that Oregon utilities view investments. This change is consistent with ways that public utility regulators in other states have started to take into account social equity principles as part of ratemaking and policy decisions. This would take a major effort.

We agree with environmental activists, rate-payer advocates, labor and faith groups and businesses that clean energy is a benefit to our communities. Removing coal pollution and doubling our renewables is an important step toward addressing climate justice. We also recommend policy changes to ensure equitable distribution of benefits, and in order to truly transform the power infrastructure and related decision making processes. We hope you will pass this important measure and put Oregon on a path toward creating a clean, healthy environment and economy that benefits all.

If you should have any questions, please contact me at maggie@coalitioncommunitiescolor.org.

Signed,



Margaret Tallmadge
Environmental Justice Manager
Coalition of Communities of Color

