



Eugene Water & Electric Board

4200 Roosevelt Blvd.
Eugene, OR 97402
(541) 685-7000
eweb.org

March 23, 2020

Dear Co-Chairs Holvey and Roblan, and Members of the Joint Committee on Coronavirus:

The Eugene Water & Electric Board (EWEB) supports a significant increase in state energy assistance funds in light of the impending crisis posed by Covid-19 and the impacts it will have throughout the State of Oregon on our most vulnerable residential and small business customers. EWEB previously submitted into OLIS on March 18th testimony supporting this action and would like to follow up with additional input on the draft Covid-19 Relief policy recommendation taken up at today's hearing.

EWEB is heartened to see the inclusion of Proposed Action 2.5:

Utilities:

Increase financial assistance directly to private and consumer-owned utilities to help low-income households and small businesses. Require PUC oversight of private utility.

The Joint Committee's discussion today clarified that it is the intent of the committee that assistance would go to all Oregon electric utilities, with oversight falling to the Oregon Public Utility Commission (OPUC) for Investor-owned utilities or in the case of Consumer-owned utilities, their elected or appointed governing boards. EWEB supports this approach.

EWEB supports financial assistance **directly** to utilities to help low-income households. EWEB has a longstanding commitment to utility programs that support low-income customers. Our utility has experience with programs administered by local CAP agencies, and more recently, internal administration. EWEB has found that bringing our assistance program in-house has proven to be the best approach to efficiently deliver utility bill assistance, with less administrative overhead and less delay for customers in crisis. We have reduced processing times to as little as 2 business days from time of submission and saved ratepayers over \$300,000 in administrative fees. Utilities that are not equipped to independently manage state provided funds should be free to partner with a Community Action Partner in meeting program requirements required by the State.

EWEB recommends that the allocation of funds to utilities be modeled similarly to LIHEAP distributions. OPUS contains statewide LIHEAP distribution data including information at the agency, community, and utility level, and should be leveraged for this purpose. Direct funding to utilities and using existing distribution methods and tools like OPUS will help assistance reach low-income and small business electric customers as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your work on these important issues and for considering EWEB's input.

Sincerely,


Rene Gonzalez
Customer Solutions Manager