

HB 2242 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Energy and Environment

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Sub-Referral To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means

Meeting Dates: 1/29

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Authorizes the Public Utility Commission (PUC) to consider differential energy burdens on low-income consumers and other economic, social equity, or environmental justice factors that impact affordability when balancing utility and consumer interests. Establishes the Office of the Low-Income and Environmental Justice Advocate to investigate ways to address and mitigate differential energy burdens and other affordability inequities. Directs the PUC to submit a report on the findings to the legislature no later than September 15, 2020.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

The Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) regulates investor-owned utilities and is responsible for ensuring utility customers have access to safe, reliable, and high quality utility services at just and reasonable rates. The scope and mandate of the PUC is determined by the legislature, which requires the PUC to balance the interests of customers and utility companies by ensuring that rates are both fair and provide adequate revenue for utilities to be financially sound (ORS 756.040).

Senate Bill 978 (2017) directed the PUC to use a public process to consider how their role as regulator of Oregon's investor-owned utilities might evolve, given changes in the energy industry and in energy policy. The PUC gathered input from stakeholders and compiled results into a report that was submitted to the Legislature on September 14, 2018. One key recommendation was to authorize the PUC to improve equitable and affordable access to energy services by considering not only the broad interests of customers, but specific needs of low-income customers and environmental justice communities.

House Bill 2242 would authorize the PUC to include in the scope of their work consideration of differential energy burdens and other economic, social equity, or environmental justice factors that affect affordability for utility customers. The bill would establish the Office of the Low-Income and Environmental Justice Advocate within the PUC to identify equity strategies and report findings to the legislature.