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Testimony to the House Energy and Environment Committee On House Bill 2242

January 29, 2019

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council supports HB 2242.

In 2017, the legislature passed SB 978 to examine investor-owned utilities (IOUs) regulation and trends that are changing the regulatory landscape. Oregon Environmental Council appreciated participating in many workshops and the hard work that Public Utility Commission (PUC) staff put into the process.

During these workshops, it became abundantly clear that the system we have in place to oversee and regulate IOUs is not inclusive enough, nor meeting the needs of all communities. The SB 978 process identified climate change, affordability, and equity as the top areas of concern.

HB 2242 implements the equity and affordability recommendations that emerged from the SB 978 process. These recommendations had strong support from many stakeholder participants.

Affordability

The bill will allow the PUC to design different rate structures for low-income customers. For example, the PUC might provide discounts to low- and fixed-income customers.

Participation

The PUC process currently funds a small group of organizations to participate in utility ratemaking proceedings, technical workshops, and rule-makings. This bill will expand that opportunity for organizations that represent low-income and environmental justice communities.

PUC Capacity

The bill will create a new staff position at the PUC for a Low Income and Environmental Justice Advocate. This staff position will help ensure that underrepresented customers have an advocate in PUC proceedings. This staff position will also coordinate with other state agencies and the Environmental Justice Task Force.

Oregon Environmental Council appreciates the SB 978 process. We strongly support HB 2242 as a way to implement recommendations to better serve low-income and other underrepresented utility ratepayers.

We urge your support of HB 2242.