

OREGON



PHYSICIANS
FOR SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY

29 January 2019

To: House Committee on Energy and Environment

Re: Oregon House Bill 2242

Guided by the values and expertise of medicine and public health, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) works to protect human life from the gravest threats to health and survival.

We enthusiastically support the passage of House Bill 2242 and encourage you to refer this bill to Ways and Means.

Oregon PSR participated as a stakeholder in the 2018 community meetings regarding Senate Bill 978, and engaged in the equity subgroup of these sessions. We recognize that health disparities along lines of income brackets exist and are exacerbated by disproportionately high energy burden, the percentage of a household's monthly income that is spent on utility bills.

House Bill 2242 will go a long way towards remedying the disproportionate energy burden shouldered by the lowest income utility ratepayers in our state. Increased opportunities and support for public engagement in the utility regulatory process will allow a greater swath of stakeholders to meaningfully give input on the policies and proposed rate changes that greatly impact their monthly expenses. HB 2242 will also give the Public Utility Commission the ability to approve differentiated rates to acknowledge and better accommodate those ratepayers for whom energy burden is unduly high. "Broadly affordable" rates do not account for the fact that people with the lowest levels of income and wealth feel the effects of their energy burden differently than those with higher incomes.

Passage of House Bill 2242 will support the creation of structures that ensure the lowest income earners in Oregon are able to save money for groceries, medicine, and transportation to work, school, and doctor's appointments. For example, low income earners in Portland struggling to make ends meet in substandard housing sometimes pay as much as \$300 or more during the coldest months on utilities. Reducing this burden yields a watershed of public health benefits not only for individual Oregonians but also for their neighbors and fellow community members.

In order to take a step in the right direction for public health equity and responsible energy burden, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility urges a "yes" vote on House Bill 2242. We thank this bill's cosponsors as well as Verde, OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon, Spark Northwest, and the Northwest Energy Coalition for their work on this bill.

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Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility
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