

HB 2855 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Energy and Environment

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Meeting Dates: 3/28

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Modifies the general powers of the Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) as described in ORS 756.040. Establishes that, in addition to other duties and powers, the PUC shall serve the public interest in decision making by: 1) protecting public utility and telecommunications utility customers and the general public by providing safe and reliable services and infrastructure; 2) developing and implementing policies that encourage social equity, environmental justice, the enhancement of the environment, greenhouse gas emissions reductions, customer choice, diverse ownership of electric generation systems, and fulfill Oregon's goals regarding energy, climate, and the health of the state's economy; 3) stimulating and promoting innovation and competition in the energy, transportation, water, and telecommunications industries; and 4) allowing and fostering broad participation in the regulatory process.

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. Two key areas stakeholders suggested directing the PUC's focus included reducing greenhouse gases and other efforts to address climate change and considering ways to improve equitable and affordable access to energy services.

House Bill 2855 would direct the PUC to broaden their focus to include protecting customers and the public with safe and reliable service and infrastructure; incorporating policies that promote social equity, environmental justice, the enhancement of the environment, reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, customer choice, diverse ownership of power generation, and the fulfillment of Oregon's energy, climate, and economic goals. The Act would charge the PUC with stimulating and promoting competition in the energy sector and related industries, and encourage the PUC to foster broad participation in energy regulation processes.