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February 4, 2020

House Interim Committee on Energy and Environment  
Chair, Karin Power  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court St., NE  
Salem, OR 97301

*Sent via email to:* Rep.KarinPower@oregonlegislature.gov

RE: Support for House Bill 4067

Dear Chair Power, Vice-Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Reschke and members of the Committee,

I am writing to express Columbia Riverkeeper's support for House Bill 4067. Columbia Riverkeeper is committed to advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion in environmental decisions. We strongly support HB 4067's goals of providing low-income and environmental justice communities with more meaningful opportunities to participate in utility regulation, as well as a reduction in the disproportionate impacts of energy costs on these communities.

As you know, in 2017 the Oregon State Legislature directed the Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) to conduct a public process aimed at exploring ways investor-owned utilities can adapt to the rapidly changing industry and policy environment. That process, as reported in the PUC's September 2018 report entitled *SB 978, Actively Adapting to the Changing Electricity Sector*,<sup>1</sup> identified a number of policy priorities, including climate change, affordability, and environmental justice.

With respect to affordability and environmental justice, the PUC's report found that low-income households, on average, spend approximately 8.2 percent of their household income on energy costs; a rate that is three times higher than for non-low income households. Currently, rates are considered "fair" when they are broadly affordable, but this does not account for the fact that income levels vary widely and families feel the effects of their energy bills differently. Fair is not the same as equitable and we need more targeted solutions to address affordability. HB 4067 will help alleviate this burden on families struggling to make ends meet by giving the PUC the authority to allow utilities to provide rate designs, such as discounts, that help reduce energy burden for low-income or other under-served customers.

Additionally, HB 4067 will increase meaningful engagement and participation for typically underrepresented communities by providing access to much-needed funding for organizations who represent low-income and environmental justice communities in utility regulatory processes. This funding will help to amplify the voices of these ratepayers, including black, indigenous, and other

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://www.oregon.gov/puc/utilities/Documents/SB978LegislativeReport-2018.pdf>

communities of color, rural communities, and communities experiencing lower incomes; ensuring they can participate in the regulatory processes in the same manner as other, broad customer groups.

For these reasons, Columbia Riverkeeper strongly urges members of the Committee to support this bill.

Sincerely,

Erin Saylor, Staff Attorney, Columbia Riverkeeper