

Multnomah County Commissioner, District 2

February 3, 2020

House Committee on Energy and Environment
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE, Room D
Salem, OR 97301

Commissioner Susheela Jayapal is in Support of HB 4067

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

My name is Susheela Jayapal and I am the Multnomah County Commissioner for District 2, North and Northeast Portland. Thank you for taking the time to read my comments in support of House Bill 4067.

My district comprises some of the most diverse neighborhoods in Multnomah County, with significant populations of people of color, and people living on extremely low incomes. Numerous studies have shown that low-income communities -- and particularly communities of color -- are disproportionately energy cost-burdened and that existing energy assistance programs fall well short of meeting the need. I hear about the effects of this burden from my constituents, with many struggling from month to month to afford their energy bills. Their inability to pay for utilities can lead to a downward spiral that ultimately results in houselessness -- a spiral from which it's very difficult to recover.

Not only are low-income Oregonians, and Oregonians of color, disproportionately energy cost-burdened; they are also those most likely to be affected by climate change, and, on the other hand, often the least likely to benefit from programs intended to address climate change. Many existing programs designed to increase energy efficiency, reduce energy usage, or move to decarbonization are simply not accessible to low-income Oregonians and Oregonians of color.

We must keep these frontline communities, and environmental and energy justice, at the forefront as we redesign our systems. HB 4067 takes some important steps in this direction: first, by specifically defining "environmental justice communities" as those most inequitably affected by climate change and by existing policies and processes; second, by authorizing the Public Utility Commission to consider the differential energy burdens and other inequities that we know exist in rate-setting; and third, by authorizing financial assistance for organizations to represent the interests of low-income ratepayers in regulatory proceedings. The last is a particularly important step towards procedural justice for these ratepayers: people who can't afford their utility bills also can ill-afford

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the time to follow and appear at proceedings in order to represent their interests. Providing funding to community-based organizations that represent the interests of these ratepayers is also a direct investment in these communities -- another form of effecting a just transition.

Thank you, again, for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Susheela Jayapal
Multnomah County Commissioner, District 2