



Oregon Citizens' Utility Board

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02/04/2020

Testimony of Samuel Pastrick

Regarding HB 4067

Before the House Committee on Energy and Environment

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

My name is Samuel Pastrick. I'm the Advocacy and Development Manager at Oregon Citizens' Utility Board (CUB). On CUB's behalf, I submit the following testimony regarding HB 4067 and encourage this committee's support for the bill.

As Oregon's designated advocate for residential utility customers, generally, CUB has served as a strong and consistent voice for affordability in energy utility regulation for over three decades. Legislative policy initiatives, like HB 4067, that are geared toward addressing historic inequalities, particularly those regarding participation among communities adversely harmed by environmental and health hazards in public processes, have come about more recently but are long overdue.

Frontline environmental justice community advocates have rightly taken a leadership role in this legislative advocacy. As perhaps a more traditional utility policy stakeholder, CUB is eager to learn more from and support these community leaders.

HB 4067, like HB 2242 (proposed 2019 legislation) before it, mirrors recommendations from an Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) investigation held in 2018 at the behest of SB 978. Enacted in 2017, SB 978 directed the PUC to facilitate a public process to examine how industry trends, technologies, and policy drivers affect the PUC's regulation of investor-owned energy utilities and, in turn, the utility business model.

The SB 978 process culminated in a set of recommendations: some changes that the PUC could make using their existing statutory authority, and others that could potentially require additional direction from the Legislature. HB 4067 reflects the SB 978 vetting process and has two goals:

The first goal is to facilitate increased participation among groups representing environmental justice interests in PUC proceedings by buoying their organizational capacity.

HB 4067 identifies environmental justice communities as individuals historically underrepresented in public processes and adversely harmed by environmental and health hazards, including communities of color; rural, coastal, and frontier Oregonians; and older folks and people with disabilities.

The second goal is to enable the PUC to allow regulated energy utilities to offer low-income rate designs, such as a billing discount, to reduce energy burdens for low-income customers.

Separate from this timely legislative authorization, the bill also compels the PUC to investigate “ways to address and mitigate, through nonbypassable means, differential energy burdens on classes of public utility customers and other inequities of affordability and environmental justice.” (In this context, “nonbypassable” means that were the PUC to establish a billing process to mitigate energy burden to certain utility customers, all customer classes, including large and industrial customers, must contribute to that goal.)

CUB participated throughout the SB 978 public process in 2018 and agreed with the investigation’s ultimate findings. In 2019, CUB advocated for the passage of HB 2242. In 2020, CUB appeals to the Legislature for their swift passage of HB 4067.

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