



20 February 2020

To: Senate Committee on Environment & Natural Resources

Re: Oregon House Bill 4067 A

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Olsen, and members of the Committee,

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 4067 A and encourage you to vote yes on this bill.

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 affirm that health disparities exist between income brackets and are exacerbated by disproportionately high energy burden, which is the percentage of a household's monthly income that is spent on utility bills.

House Bill 4067 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 4067 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.

Imagine having to make the hard choice between heating your home and putting food on the table. This is a very real decision faced regularly by Oregonians across the state. Experiencing high energy burdens can greatly affect the mental and physical health of families by increasing financial stress, cases of asthma, respiratory problems, heart disease, arthritis, and rheumatism. Children and the elderly are most susceptible to these health impacts caused by improperly heated or cooled homes. Energy affordability is paramount especially for those with chronic health needs such as an asthmatic who relies on electric-powered nebulizers, or a diabetic who needs to refrigerate insulin.

Passage of House Bill 4067 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 households in Portland struggling to make ends meet in poorly-insulated housing sometimes pay as much as \$300 or more during the coldest months on utilities. Reducing this burden will yield a watershed of public health benefits not only for individual Oregonians but also for their neighbors and fellow community members.

In order to move in the right direction for public health equity and responsible energy burden, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility urges a "yes" vote on House Bill 4067. We thank this bill's cosponsors as well as Verde and the large coalition of organizations who have worked for the passage of this bill.

Sincerely,

Damon Motz-Storey, Healthy Climate Program Director
Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility

