

February 20, 2020

Senator Michael Dembrow, Chair
Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: House Bill 4067A – Letter of Support

Dear Chair Dembrow,

Oregon Energy Fund (OEF) is Oregon's only statewide energy assistance nonprofit. Since 1989, OEF has helped more than 300,000 Oregonians pay their monthly energy bills in times of crisis, ensuring that low-income families don't have to sacrifice food, rent, medicine, or childcare to pay for electricity. In those three decades, we've also witnessed firsthand the insidious nature of energy burden and its devastating impact on low-income families: a silent emergency unfolding in darkened homes and living rooms across the state.

1 in 4 Oregon households struggled to pay their bills last year – twice the number who faced food insecurity – with tens of thousands spending up to 25% of their annual income on energy. Thousands more cut back on necessities like meals or medical care to keep the lights on. The consequences are dire. Members of energy burdened households are at increased risk of respiratory disease, heart failure, arthritis, depression, diabetes, malnutrition, and childhood trauma. Around 5.5 million Americans resort to payday loans or other predatory forms of lending each year to pay their bills, and a 2018 study by the National Energy Assistance Directors Association suggests that as many as 3.5 million people became homeless that year due to their energy bills.

Despite this clear and pressing need, utility hardship remains little discussed and poorly understood. And while energy assistance programs like OEF and LIHEAP provide a vital safety net to families in need, such programs are only a band-aid solution to a crisis that has deep roots in systemic poverty and inequality. House Bill 4067A allows the Public Utility Commission to consider these very issues when setting rates, and to investigate further ways to address and mitigate the impacts of energy burden on low-income households. These changes have the potential to make a serious difference in the lives of our neighbors. For this reason, Oregon Energy Fund strongly supports House Bill 4067A.

This is a critical step toward ensuring all Oregonians have affordable access to the basic need of electricity. Please vote yes on House Bill 4067A.

Sincerely,



Brian Allbritton
Executive Director, Oregon Energy Fund