

Vote YES on HB 4067

From the desk of Rep Ziks

We support HB 4067, which would advance affordability and accessible public process in utility regulation. The bill:

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- Expands non-state-funded resources, to organizations representing ratepayers from low-income and environmental justice communities in the same manner that other customer groups currently access these funds.
- Defines environmental justice communities to include low-income communities, black, Indigenous, and other communities of color, tribes, rural, coastal, and frontier communities, and other people underrepresented in public process, such as seniors, youth, and people with disabilities.
- Gives the Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) authority to allow investor-owned utilities to provide rate designs, such as discounts, that help reduce energy burden (a disproportionate percentage of a family's income that goes to energy bills) for low-income ratepayers.

HB 4067 is the result of stakeholder input provided during the SB 978 (passed unanimously by both chambers in 2017) process, which explored how to adapt utility regulation to accommodate new policy and technology drivers. For example, when a family is energy burdened -- as many are in communities in every district in the state, especially in Eastern and Southern Oregon -- it fosters difficult decisions about whether to pay utility bills or buy essentials like food or medicine -- decisions no Oregonian should face. Energy bill assistance and weatherization programs are oversubscribed and not always accessible, so new strategies are needed, especially ones that provide more sustained relief. Other states allow utilities to utilize differentiated rates for income-qualified ratepayers, but currently the PUC has no authority to allow the utilities it regulates to act similarly. **HB 4067 mandates nothing, but simply opens a new toolbox and creates a process and resources through which to help figure out how to use the tools. It's common sense that will have significant benefits to the energy system, local economies, and family budgets.**

