



March 30, 2021

Chair Williams, Vice-Chair's Leif and Ruiz, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Community Action Partnership of Oregon (CAPO), I would like to express our support for House Bill 2739, which will increase funding for critical energy assistance throughout the state with the -1 amendments. We want to thank Representative Leif and electric utilities for their leadership on this effort to temporarily increase low-income electric bill payment and crisis assistance by \$10 million annually through 2023.

The recent snow and ice storm that left more than 330,000 Oregonians without power was a reminder of the importance of electricity in our daily life. For many Oregonians struggling to keep the lights on, affordable energy is an unfortunate burden. This past year, our network assisted 21,500 Oregon households who were unable to pay energy bills, with emergency COVID-19 assistance. While additional federal assistance is encouraging news, the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is only able to serve about 20% of eligible Oregonians. Throughout the state, we are seeing a tremendous need for assistance to prevent energy utility shut-offs, which has only increased in the midst of today's public health crisis and recent catastrophic wildfires. For many Oregonians, this legislation will help alleviate this burden.

With the biggest barrier to gaining assistance for people of color being access, this streamlined approach would allow for express enrollment, removing hurdles to eligibility and increasing access for Oregonians unable to get assistance in existing state programs. This temporary funding will expand access for families in marginalized communities that are between 60-80% of median income, in addition to serving families at or below 80% of median income, which we believe is a good model.

We ask that you join our network in supporting this legislation to help provide assistance to help low-income Oregonians facing delinquent electrical utility accounts.

Sincerely,

Janet Merrell

Janet Merrell
Executive Director