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Dear Chair Power, Vice-Chair Helm, Vice-Chair Brock Smith, and Members of the House Committee on Energy & Environment,

Thank you for the opportunity to urge you to support House Bill 2475, the Oregon Energy Affordability Act. Rural, low income, black, Indigenous and people of color, have the highest rates of energy burden. HB 2475 will expand resources to support the participation of crucial, but traditionally marginalized voices in utility regulation, and help to alleviate energy burden by allowing the Public Utility Commission to authorize lower rates for families who can least afford their energy bills. These are things that any legislator can and should be able to get behind, this bill is an opportunity to make positive change around energy and the environment from both sides of the aisle, and it is unfinished business from last session.

HB 2475 is also an important step toward COVID relief, especially for places like Coos County where 30%-39% of County households are considered energy burdened and earning 200% or below federal poverty level according to the Biennial Energy Report from the Oregon Department of Energy. That report was generated before COVID to depict energy burden, the share of someone's income that goes toward energy bills, across Oregon. What is striking is how significant the impact in that the statistics have likely gotten worse since the pandemic began.

In a recent study, 4.8 million Americans, a number greater than the population of our state, could not pay at least one energy bill during COVID-19. We already know that Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities are the most energy burdened, but survey analyzed in the study found that those communities were especially hard-hit, and that of the people who participated 25% missed a bill and 10% were disconnected across demographics. This was especially exacerbated for families who experienced a COVID case. Energy burden has a significant impact on our communities and on local economies. When someone is behind on their energy bills, they are more likely to become homeless. <https://phys.org/news/2021-01-covid-energy-insecurity-low-income-americans.html>

I urge you as members of the House Energy and Environment Committee to vote in favor of HB 2475 in order to increase funding for energy affordability and allow the PUC the authority to approve differentiated rates that alleviate energy burden for many Oregonians.

Warmly,

Jennifer R Sordyl, Coos Bay Oregon