



Coalition of
Communities of
Color

April 22nd, 2021

To: Senate Committee on Energy and Environment

RE: Oregon House Bill 2475, Energy Affordability

Dear Chair Beyer, Vice-Chair Findley, and members of the Committee,

My name is Nikita Daryanani, I use she/her pronouns, and I am the Climate and Energy Policy Manager for the Coalition of Communities of Color. Formed in 2001, the Coalition of Communities of Color (CCC) is an alliance of culturally specific community-based organizations with representation from African, African American, Latinx, Middle Eastern and North African, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Slavic communities in Oregon. CCC works to improve outcomes for communities of color through policy analysis and advocacy, environmental justice, culturally-appropriate data and research, and leadership development in communities of color.

CCC wholeheartedly supports House Bill 2475A, the Energy Affordability Act. I have heard so many stories from community members detailing how their energy bills have increased over the past year - as the pandemic required children to stay at home, many families, for example, experienced increased electricity bills as their kids were attending school and classes from home. And the recent wildfires required many to stay indoors with their air conditioning running to stay safe from the wildfire smoke, which also increased electricity bills.

But these crises have only exacerbated an issue that Oregonians were already facing - high energy burden, or the percentage of income spent on energy bills and costs. Data from 2019 showed that the lowest income households in Oregon are also the most energy burdened. And nationwide, studies conducted before the pandemic found that low-income Black and Latinx households have *been* spending disproportionate amounts of their income on energy.¹ It is these same communities who are especially vulnerable to energy insecurity, along with households with children, or folks who rely on medical devices.² This tells us that now, more than ever, policies that make energy more affordable for low-income households are critical for providing much-needed relief to struggling families. Nobody should have to choose between essentials like medicine or food or electricity because they cannot afford them. By giving the Public Utilities Commission the authority to consider financial burdens in rate structures, HB 2475 offers a long-term solution to reducing disproportionately high energy costs.

Further, HB 2475 creates opportunities for environmental justice communities throughout Oregon to meaningfully participate in the regulatory decision-making processes that impact issues such as utility disconnections and community solar and other community renewable energy projects, and many others. We see this component of the bill as an important step towards building a more accessible, affordable, energy system from which all communities can benefit and provide input in. We cannot

¹ "Report: 'Energy Burden' on Low-Income, African American, & Latino Households up to Three Times as High as Other Homes, More Energy Efficiency Needed." April 20, 2016. <https://www.aceee.org/press/2016/04/report-energy-burden-low-income>

² "COVID-19 increased energy insecurity among low-income Americans." January 2021. <https://phys.org/news/2021-01-covid-energy-insecurity-low-income-americans.html>

support the -A11 amendment and believe it stands in opposition to the goals of HB2475 by significantly restricting new and existing intervenors from accessing intervenor funding, and limiting the decisions that CCC and its partners and member organizations could engage in by restricting access to resources for this engagement.

The Energy Affordability Act's twin goals of making energy more affordable and regulatory processes more inclusive position it to be a significant step towards an energy system that meets the needs of all Oregonians, and provides assistance to those who need it most. We are proud to be part of the coalition working to pass this policy and strongly urge a "yes" vote on this bill as currently drafted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nikita Daryanani". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Nikita Daryanani, Climate and Energy Policy Manager, Coalition of Communities of Color