

OREGON



PHYSICIANS
FOR SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY

23 April 2021

To: Senate Committee on Energy and Environment

RE: Oregon House Bill 2475 A, The Oregon Energy Affordability Act

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

Guided by the values and expertise of medicine and public health, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) works to protect human life from the gravest threats to health and survival. We are an organization of over 2,800 health professionals and public health advocates statewide working collaboratively with community partners to educate and advocate for societal and policy change that protects human health at the local, state, national, and international level. We seek a healthy, just, and peaceful world for present and future generations.

We enthusiastically support the passage of House Bill 2475 A, the Oregon Energy Affordability Act, and encourage you to vote yes on this bill. **We oppose the proposed -A11 amendment** as it would undermine existing and new efforts by groups advocating for the varied interests of energy ratepayers.

The field of study regarding the social determinants of health tells us that major health disparities exist between different income brackets. Furthermore, these health disparities are exacerbated by disproportionately high energy burden, the percentage of a family's monthly income that is spent on utility bills for heating, electricity, and more.

High rates of energy burden was already a problem prior to 2020 but the issue has gotten worse during the COVID-19 pandemic--[a new survey from Indiana University](#) showed that low-income Americans who experienced COVID-19 symptoms were more likely to be unable to pay an energy bill. This is because financially insecure families are more likely to be frontline workers, and getting sick means even less money available to pay energy bills. When families have to make impossible decisions in the midst of scarcity and high energy bills, the health impacts can be devastating: going without heat in the cold of winter, not knowing whether electricity for essential medical devices will be disconnected, and more. House Bill 2475 will help provide much-needed relief and improved health outcomes across the state.

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Now more than ever this bill offers an opportunity to provide real relief to Oregon's most energy burdened families, especially BIPOC (Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color) Oregonians as well as rural counties such as those in southeastern Oregon where energy burden rates are the highest.

Low-income energy bill assistance and similar programs play an important role in addressing energy burden, but rate structures provide a more comprehensive baseline of relief and predictability so that low-income families have reliably more affordable bills. Energy burden is a major issue and we believe this bill is an important complement to bill assistance and arrearage relief efforts.

Oregon PSR participated as a stakeholder in Public Utility Commission community meetings launched by the passage of Senate Bill 978 in 2017. Our experiences working with the Public Utility Commission in 2018 illustrated to us the importance of ensuring that people who are most impacted by energy regulatory decisions should be supported in having a seat at the table. House Bill 2475 will help increase access to participating in utility regulatory proceedings and therefore allow the critical expertise of rural, coastal, low-income, and BIPOC communities to be shared early and often in energy decision making spaces. That is why the -A11 amendments should not be adopted--the amendment would greatly limit existing and new stakeholder groups from receiving support to engage in these critical processes.

We hope that you all will take the opportunity to support this forward-thinking, much-needed bill that will be a key energy component of providing relief to Oregonians who need it most. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Damon Motz-Storey

Healthy Climate Program Director

Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility

