



NW Energy Coalition
for a clean and affordable energy future

**Testimony of Jeff Bissonnette
In support of HB 2475
February 1, 2021
In front of the Oregon House Committee on
Energy and Environment**

Chair Marsh, Vice-Chair Brock Smith, Vice-Chair Helm and members of the Committee:

My name is Jeff Bissonnette and I am testifying today on behalf of the NW Energy Coalition. The Coalition is the region's broadest alliance of utilities, businesses, advocates and communities who are interested in advancing clean, reliable, affordable, equitable energy policy across the Pacific Northwest.

The Coalition helped draft this legislation and has supported it over two sessions. We consider this bill an unfinished bipartisan effort from 2020 when it passed the House and was poised to pass the Senate. We concur with the points made by our members and partners in previous panels. We also want to focus on three key features of this bill that might fly under the radar.

First, the bill does not mandate any changes to how rates and bills are currently administered. Rather, it gives the Public Utility Commission the authority it has sought for multiple years to use a data-driven public process to explore how best to mitigate energy burden. With that data and accompanying public processes, the Commission can decide how best to proceed in setting rates in a range of dockets. We are confident our collective analytical expertise will result in decisions that best serve the interests of all ratepayers in this state.

Second, this bill would allow sorely needed support for Oregonians with the highest energy burdens in our state. These Oregonians are overwhelmingly in rural areas. The current tools that community agencies working with vulnerable households have available are limited, leaving these relief workers and the Oregonians they serve with very few options. HB 2475 will help the PUC to better tailor rates to relieve rate burdens in the actual rate-making process. Passage of HB 2475 would also allow exploration of new forms of energy assistance, such as percentage of income payment plans, that more pointedly address energy burden, but also have the potential to alleviate administrative burden on the agencies who offer these plans. These expanded toolsets are currently the reality in many states nationwide, including Nevada, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.

Third, this bill would allow for organizations representing affected communities themselves to participate in Public Utility Commission processes and provide their needed expertise during a time of incredible change and opportunity for our energy grid. We have observed Commissioners, staff, utilities and advocates in need of greater and more diverse participation in order to forward the sort of vision we need to safely, reliably, and affordably mold a smarter and more responsive grid. At the same time, rural, low-income, and environmental justice communities, are often left out of Commission processes,

among other reasons because they are not funded to participate in the way that the usual players are. We are enthusiastic about the provision in HB 2475 that expands intervener funding and supports the broadening of perspectives that is sorely needed in the state energy space.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 2475. We urge your support and I'm happy to answer any questions.