



Office of Sustainability

February 1st, 2021

Representative Pam Marsh, Chair
House Committee on Energy and Environment
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE, Room D
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Multnomah County Strongly Support HB 2475

Chair Marsh and Members of the Committee:

Multnomah County asks for your support of House Bill 2475, a thoughtful approach to giving voice to and protecting Oregon's most vulnerable communities.

HB 2475 acts on the learnings of the Senate Bill 978 process by building procedural and distributional equity into electric utility regulation in Oregon. In 2017, the legislature adopted SB 978, which led to a process at the Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) to consider the many trends changing the landscape of electric utilities and their regulation. Multnomah County staff participated and recognized PUC staff's commitment to a process that sought to include and value perspectives from a wide range of participants. The SB 978 process made clear that the voices of communities that have historically lacked the opportunity to influence PUC decisions are essential in the transition to a clean, equitable, and just energy system.

HB 2475 is a powerful next step to making the promise of SB 978 a reality. First, the bill will help ensure that voices of low income and environmental justice communities are part of PUC processes by resourcing community organizations to represent the needs of their communities at the PUC. Multnomah County has observed that the key to equitable outcomes is ensuring that the expertise and experience of under-represented communities is at the decision making table. Resourcing their participation, like the PUC resources other customer groups, will ensure that their expertise and experience can shape our energy transition.

Second, HB 2475 recognizes the profound impact energy poverty has on Oregonians across the state, and establishes a path to address the disproportionate burden that low-income members of our community face. Multnomah County is proud of our low income energy assistance and weatherization programs that support the economic and overall well-being of our community

members each day. However, energy burden in Oregon is an issue that impacts many,¹ and those impacts are disproportionately felt by vulnerable communities.² COVID-19 and the associated economic downturn have exacerbated energy poverty and energy insecurity in Oregon,³ and have also compounded existing inequities.⁴

Unless we consider additional approaches to the challenge of energy burden, Oregonians will continue to suffer the devastating impacts that energy poverty brings to communities across the state. National data indicates that low-income households have gone without food or medical care to pay their energy bills.⁵ HB 2475 creates a path for differentiated electric utility rates that will protect the most vulnerable members of our community at a time when energy access determines our community members's ability to live, thrive, and participate in society.

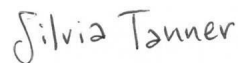
HB 2475 is the right approach for Oregon, and Multnomah County looks forward to working with the Legislature, PUC, utilities, and the broad diversity of stakeholders to put HB 2475 into practice and advance a just energy transition in the state.

I appreciate your consideration of these comments and ask for your support of HB 2475.

Sincerely,



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¹ Oregon Department of Energy, *2020 Biennial Energy Report* at 102 (Nov. 2020) (“The annual Home Energy Figure Affordability Gap (HEAG) . . . found that 521,937 out of 1,591,835 Oregon households are estimated to be struggling to pay their energy bills, which indicates nearly 33 percent of Oregonians are home energy burdened. In addition, 100,456 households with incomes below 50 percent of the Federal Poverty Level paid an average of 23 percent of their annual income for their home energy bills.”).

² *Id.* at 101 (“[low-income households, Black, Hispanic, Native American, renters, and older adult households all have disproportionately higher home energy burdens than the national median household. Note that many highly burdened groups are intersectional, meaning that they can face compounding, intersecting causes of inequality and injustice, with energy burden potentially representing just one facet of inequity.”).

³ Oregon Public Utility Commission, *COVID-19 Arrears Data*, <https://www.oregon.gov/puc/utilities/Documents/COVID-Impacts-ArrearsData.pdf>.

⁴ Multnomah County, *New numbers show COVID-19 damage to communities of color; leaders call for better data collection* (May 1, 2020), <https://multco.us/novel-coronavirus-covid-19/news/new-numbers-show-covid-19-damage-communities-color-leaders-call>; Pew Research Center, *Financial and health impacts of COVID-19 vary widely by race and ethnicity* (May 5, 2020) <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/05/05/financial-and-health-impacts-of-covid-19-vary-widely-by-race-and-ethnicity/>.

⁵ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Lights Out in the Cold: Reforming Utility Shut-Off Policies as If Human Rights Matter* at 13-14 (Mar. 2017), https://naacp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Lights-Out-in-the-Cold_NAACP-ECJP-4.pdf.