

February 2, 2022

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

Re: Multnomah County Strongly Supports HB 4058-2

Chair Marsh and members of the Committee:

Multnomah County asks for your support of House Bill 4058 (HB 4058) and its -2 amendment (HB 4058-2). This urgent and critical bill includes life-saving measures that will help address some of the risks associated with heat events for Oregon's most vulnerable communities.

The last two years cast a light on Oregonians' increasing vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. Multnomah County experienced unprecedented loss of life as a result of heat during the summer of 2021. Just a year earlier, we experienced an also unprecedented, week-long hazardous air event due to wildfire smoke, something that has become commonplace in other regions of the state. These were two sobering reminders that climate change is making severe weather events more frequent and more extreme. As Oregon's summers grow hotter and drier, stressors like heat and smoke will continue to disproportionately impact already vulnerable communities, exacerbating inequities created by systemic racism, intergenerational poverty, income inequality, and federal disinvestment in social services. HB 4058-2 includes tools to mitigate those impacts.

The June 2021 heat dome caused unprecedented health impacts in Multnomah County. We lost 69 community members, and visits to hospital emergency departments for heat illness surged to more than 30 times above normal levels. Emergency medical services were overextended and struggled to keep up with the volume of need. Some members of our community were especially vulnerable to heat illness and death, an experience that is supported by scientific research. A recent study found strong effects from heat on children¹, and we know that heat can also affect

¹ Bernstein, A. S., Sun, S., Weinberger, K. R., Spangler, K. R., Sheffield, P. E., & Wellenius, G. A. (2022). Warm Season and Emergency Department Visits to US Children's Hospitals. *Environmental health perspectives*, 130(1), 017001.

older adults, pregnant people, and people with chronic health conditions. The health impacts of the 2021 heat dome were preventable. To avoid similar impacts in the future, Oregonians need the resources that HB 4058-2 would provide.

HB 4058-2 creates an emergency air conditioning and air filtration deployment program that would provide crucial relief from those stressors to medically and financially vulnerable Oregonians. The bill would help keep people safe as homes and apartments without air conditioning do not cool down at night during periods of warm overnight temperatures, driving heat-related illness during heat events.² Indeed, HB 4058-2 is consistent with one of the strategies to help people stay safe in place that our report *June 2021 Extreme Heat Event: Preliminary Findings and Action Steps* identified: scaling existing partnerships, programs, and policy efforts to install cooling systems in low-income housing.³

HB 4058-2 also creates a Heat Pump Deployment Program that prioritizes low-income and environmental justice communities,⁴ especially rural communities currently relying on bulk fuels like wood, oil, and propane, or on electric resistance heating. Heat pumps deployed through that program would provide cooling during the hot season and, importantly, would also provide much needed relief to Oregonians heating with less efficient, more expensive means that often also have negative health and environmental impacts.

Finally, HB 4058-2 directs the Oregon Public Utility Commission to explore strategies to address energy bill spikes resulting from extreme weather events. Energy burden in Oregon already impacts many,⁵ and those impacts are disproportionately felt by vulnerable communities including Black, Indigenous and Other People of Color and older adults.⁶ In Summer 2021, we had reports of community members who did not operate air conditioning units that were in their

² Multnomah County, *Preliminary Review on Excessive Heat Deaths in Multnomah County* at 11 (Jul. 13, 2021), available at <https://www.multco.us/preliminaryreview-excessive-heat-deaths-multnomah-county-june-2021>.

³ Multnomah County, *June 2021 Extreme Heat Event: Preliminary Findings and Action Steps* at 15 (Aug. 18, 2021), available at https://multco-web7-psh-files-usw2.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/June2021_Heat_Event-Preliminary_Findings-08_21%20%281%29.pdf.

⁴ HB 4058-2 defines “environmental justice communities” by referencing ORS 469A.400. Under ORS 469A.400(5), “Environmental justice communities” includes communities of color, communities experiencing lower incomes, tribal communities, rural communities, coastal communities, communities with limited infrastructure and other communities traditionally underrepresented in public processes and adversely harmed by environmental and health hazards, including seniors, youth and persons with disabilities.”

⁵ 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.”).

⁶ *Id.* at 101 (“[l]ow-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.”).

homes due to worry about the additional cost. As the frequency and severity of extreme weather increases, fear of bill spikes should not prevent people from relying on the energy they need to stay safe in place.

This bill includes urgent measures to keep our communities safe and prevent deaths. We appreciate your consideration of these comments and ask for your support of HB 4058-2.

Sincerely,

/s/ John Wasiutynski

John Wasiutynski

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