



DATE: March 16, 2023
FROM: Sammi Teo, Public Policy Advocate
RE: Support for Building Resilience (SB 868, SB 869, SB 870, SB 871)

Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Findley, and members of the Senate Committee on Energy & Environment,

Oregon Food Bank's mission is to eliminate hunger and its root causes. In pursuit of our mission, we advocate to change policies that drive hunger and poverty.

No one should have to decide between having electricity or feeding their family.

No one should have to decide between having electricity or feeding their family, but that is too often the case in Oregon. Oregon households are facing rampant rates of energy burden, which is the percentage of household income spent on energy costs. All across [Southern and Eastern Oregon, 71-72% of households under 60% of the Median Family Income are energy burdened](#). When compared to white (non-Hispanic) households, the median energy burden of [Black households is 43% higher, and for Native American households is 45% higher](#). The data is clear: Oregonians are facing energy bills they cannot longer afford.

Lower-income households, who already [spend 30% of their income on food](#) (as opposed to higher-income households who spend 7.6%), face higher costs for utilities because their homes are often less resilient and energy efficient. Improving energy efficiency is a direct, multi-beneficial way to decrease energy costs. It's more affordable to build all-electric with heat pumps and to live and work in buildings that waste less energy. However, too many Oregonians are living with outdated, inefficient, and carbon intensive heat sources. To make matters worse, many Oregon residents have seen their rates raised by [more than 40% in the past 13 months](#), while the cost of renewable energy sources like solar and wind are falling.

We need to improve our energy efficiency programs by streamlining and making them simpler to navigate so that low-income Oregonians can access and easily compare them to determine what's best for their household, and by aligning them with new Federal incentives to leverage state funds.

We need resilient homes to stay safe and healthy in the face of growing climate harms.

Climate harms, such as wildfire, wildfire smoke, and extreme heat waves place a significant strain on the immediate and long-term health of Oregonians. [In Multnomah County alone, during the heatwave in just the last week of June 2021, there were 257 emergency department and urgent care visits for heat illness.](#)

The health of our communities directly impacts rates of poverty and food insecurity. Not only do climate harms forcibly displace entire communities¹, which reinforces housing and employment instability, but they also cause adverse health impacts that have a wide range of economic consequences, such as increased medical costs and debt, or chronic health conditions that escalate barriers to work opportunities and affect one's long-term earning potential.

Knowing that climate harms will only worsen in frequency and severity and further harm the health and financial stability of Oregonians, we need to take action today. Important changes we make now will be felt for decades. Homes and buildings are the first lines of defense for threats like wildfire smoke and extreme heat. All new buildings should be built smart from the start and more resilient, such as with sturdier windows and doors and stronger insulation.

This is why we urge you to support SB 868, 869, 870, and 871. Thank you very much.

¹ During the wildfires in Sep. 2020, more than 40,000 Oregonians had to evacuate their homes. [Office of Emergency Mgmt.](#)