

Department of County Human Services

February 19, 2025

House Committee On Commerce and Consumer Protection
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Subject: Support for House Bill 3179

Chair Sosa and Members of the Committee:

Multnomah County asks for your support for a more community-centric approach to rate setting for Oregon's investor-owned energy utilities (IOUs). Our community is struggling under the weight of drastic increases in their energy utility bills in just the last five years. In fact, residential customers of both Portland General Electric and Pacific Power have seen increases of close to 50% in their energy rates since 2020.

Your support of House Bill 3179, with the -1 amendment, would expand the toolset at the disposal of the Public Utility Commission and stakeholders to ensure greater transparency, better processes, and a more comprehensive assessment of rate increase proposals that would allow better consideration of their impact on Oregonians.

Multnomah County works to improve the well-being of the community we serve by providing accessible, high-quality, and innovative public services that create stability, enhance opportunities, and reduce disparities. As a weatherization and energy assistance provider, we see firsthand the impact that the drastic rate increases of the last five years have had on some of the most vulnerable members of our community. We also see the compounded impact of rate increases that become effective during the winter, along with the high usage required to keep homes warm. Among the several improvements it would bring to the ratemaking process, HB 3179, with the -1 amendment, addresses some of our concerns by allowing for rate increases to become effective outside of the heating season or to be phased in when their magnitude may impact people's ability to maintain energy utility service.

Energy utility service is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Yet, the high number of energy utility disconnections rates that we saw in 2024 show that, as rates continue to increase, our community increasingly struggles to maintain access to this necessity. Those disconnections threaten people's health and lives, their food security, and their ability to be well and thrive. Disconnections can even be grounds for eviction, an especially

concerning impact at a time when housing security is a central issue for Multnomah County and the State of Oregon.¹ Our community cannot continue to sustain the pace and magnitude of rate increases that we saw in the last five years. HB 3179 seeks to address that reality by allowing for a more human-centric rate-setting process.

We look forward to continuing to engage in the important conversations taking place about energy affordability for Oregonians. We appreciate your consideration of these comments and ask for your support of HB 3179.

Sincerely,

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¹ <https://oregoncub.org/news/blog/renters-rights-past-due-utility-bills-and-preventing-disconnection/2801/>