

May 7, 2025

House Committee on Rules

RE: HB 3179 (Fair Energy Act)

Chair Bowman, and Vice Chairs Drazen and Pham:

My name is Jamie Pang, and I am the Director of Programs at Oregon Just Transition Alliance, a member-based coalition of more than 20 urban and rural communities across the state. Together, we represent thousands of Oregonians who are on the front lines of economic injustice and the climate crisis. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of HB 3179 - The FAIR Energy Act.

Right now, OJTA's communities are facing high rent, rising energy bills, and extreme weather events. During our 2020 statewide listening tour, our communities shared that they were forced to choose between paying rent or heating their homes. Five years later, that reality hasn't changed, but this bill offers a step towards relief.

I've personally been involved in Public Utility Commission (PUC) interventions in Southern California from 2017-2019, and the recent spike in energy prices here in Oregon feels all too familiar. It wasn't until 2022, when the California PUC adopted an affordability metric to assess proposed rate hikes¹ similar to the cumulative impact analysis proposed in the FAIR Energy Act. This metric would have helped me advocate for ratepayers during interventions. Oregon has a chance to act now, or we risk even greater hardship in an already uncertain economy.

Secondly, we've identified a crucial period between November and March when for-profit utilities should not be raising energy rates. Winter utility bills are already a burden for many households, as shown by a spike in disconnections after a winter rate hike in 2024. PGE shut off power to 14,834 homes, and by the end of May, close to 10% of its residential customers were behind on payments. That's 77,196 Oregon households with debt due to high energy bills. In fact, OJTA has an Alliance community member that had over \$2,000 in energy debt. She would have had a shut off but-for a medical certificate for her mom's

¹<https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/news-and-updates/all-news/cpuc-continues-efforts-to-address-affordability-of-utility-rates>.

oxygen tank. And even then, a medical certificate does not always protect people from disconnection.² And yet, utilities such as PGE reported record profits last year- \$2.47 billion.³ We need the FAIR Energy Act because it creates a seasonal safety net for Oregonians, while allowing utilities to recover costs during lower-usage months.

Thirdly, the FAIR Energy Act introduces a system where rate increases are planned in advance in three to seven year increments. Ideally, this spreads rate increases out over time, making them smaller and more manageable for customers, and prevents utilities from coming in for back to back rate increases.

I know we all share the same values of addressing the cost of living crisis in Oregon. HB 3179 is a solution our most vulnerable community members need.

Thank you.

² According to Citizen's Utility Board (CUB) data, PGE alone disconnected 57 households with medical certs from Feb-May 2024 after its Jan 2024 rate increase.

³<https://abc7news.com/post/pge-reports-profit-247b-2024-shattering-records-second-year-row/15904733/>