



01/29/2019

Dear Chair Helm and Members of the Committee,

RE: House Bill (HB) 2242

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on HB 2242 and indicate our strong support for the passage of this bill.

OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon is a membership-driven organization building power and leadership of communities experiencing first and worst the impacts of environmental racism.

As a participant in the Senate Bill 978 process on behalf of OPAL, there is no doubt that HB 2242 is a step into the right direction for Oregonians' right to meaningful participation in processes relating to energy. Moving this bill forward gets us closer to the goal of making sure that energy burden does not force low income rate payers to make the hard choice between a roof, a meal, a job or other needs.

The impacts of energy burden are real, intense and must be addressed. A 2016 report from American Council for an Energy Efficiency Economy indicates low-income households, households of color, multifamily, and renting households spend a much larger percentage of their income on energy bills than the average family. Many of whom, due to skyrocketing rents, live further from urban centers and the amenities they offer. Many of our communities live in older housing with poor ventilation and weatherization, aging inefficient appliances and outdated heating systems, spending an average 7.2 percent of their income on utility bills¹- \$2,880 annually on a household income of \$40,000. This clearly indicates the need to address energy burden and ensure that community defines and advances benefits to achieve equity for low-income ratepayers.

Granting the Public Utility Commission authority to create a process for a rate structure is high priority. Representatives of low income communities must have the opportunity to provide this direction. PUC decision-making impacts our health and safety, investment in the local economy,

¹Drehobl, Ariel, and Lauren Ross. "Lifting the High Energy Burden in America's Largest Cities: How Energy Efficiency Can Improve Low Income and Underserved Communities." ., 2016, energyefficiencyforall.org/sites/default/files/Lifting%20the%20High%20Energy%20Burden_0.pdf.



OPAL
Environmental Justice Oregon

opalpdx.org

3202 SE 82nd Ave, Suite B, Portland, OR 97266 | 503-774-4503

and job creation in our community. More importantly, PUC decision-making can help prevent hard choices between paying for energy at the expense of other lifeline services.

Fair treatment and meaningful involvement of environmental justice communities in making decisions which often have disproportionately impacted our livelihood, must be offered the necessary resources for this participation to happen. This is a core principle of environmental justice. Our communities must have an opportunity to participate in decisions about activities that affect our environment and health. Regulatory agencies must be required to consider the input of low income communities and communities of color. **In order to achieve energy justice.**

We strongly support the creation of a low income and environmental justice office and welcome and support the low income and environmental justice advocate position. This is significant for our communities to be included in those critical decision-making processes. **Remember that nothing about us should take place without us.**

We appreciate your leadership and urge you all to pass HB 2242.

Sincerely,

Maria Hernandez
Policy and Advocacy Manager
OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon