

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources On House Bill 4067

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council strongly supports HB 4067.

In 2017, the legislature passed SB 978 to examine investor-owned utilities (IOUs) regulation and trends that are changing the regulatory landscape. Oregon Environmental Council appreciated participating in many workshops and the hard work that Public Utility Commission (PUC) staff put into the process. During these workshops, it became abundantly clear that the system we have in place to oversee and regulate IOUs is not inclusive enough, nor meeting the needs of all communities. The SB 978 process identified climate change, affordability, and equity as the top areas of concern.

HB 4067 implements the equity and affordability recommendations that were developed by community advocates with support from PUC staff, utilities, and traditional regulatory stakeholders in the course of the SB 978 process. These recommendations provide more meaningful opportunity for participation and allows PUC flexibility to consider equity in rate structure design.

The bill will allow the PUC to design different rate structures, such as discounts, for low-income customers. This recognizes that a broadly affordable rate does not meet the needs of all groups equally.

The PUC process currently funds a small group of organizations to participate in utility ratemaking proceedings, technical workshops, and rule-makings. This bill will expand that opportunity for organizations that represent low-income and environmental justice communities, including rural communities. It is very important to provide resources to overcome the many barriers keeping people out of decision-making.

Oregon Environmental Council strongly supports HB 4067 in implementing recommendations from the SB 978 process to better serve low-income and other underrepresented utility ratepayers.