

February 20, 2020

Chair Dembrow, Vice-chair Olsen; Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

Re: HB 4067

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice-chair Olsen, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the NW Energy Coalition (Coalition), we are writing to express our strong support for HB 4067, which resurrects portions of our efforts on HB 2242 last year to broaden participation in regulatory processes and better consider the interests of low-income and underserved customers in utility regulation at the Public Utility Commission (PUC).

The Coalition is an alliance of about 100 environmental, civic and human service organizations, progressive utilities and businesses in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana and British Columbia. We promote development of renewable energy and energy conservation, consumer protection, low-income energy assistance, and fish and wildlife restoration in the Columbia Basin.

The Coalition has a long history of working to advance clean and affordable energy through an inclusive lens embracing the needs of communities and customers. We regularly engage in utility regulatory processes at the PUC. In 2018, we participated in the proceeding initiated by Senate Bill 978, which examined the current utility business model. This process was one of the best we have experienced at the PUC – in no small part due to the diverse participation and richness of the dialog that this diversity engendered. HB 4067 content derives entirely from the joint recommendations that emerged from the SB 978 process.

HB 4067 will pave the way for lasting improvements to the regulatory process, changes recommended in the PUC's report to the legislature at the conclusion of the 978 process. Specifically, we are enthusiastic that the bill will:

1. Provide the PUC with the authority to authorize rate designs and programs to improve service to low-income and other underrepresented in PUC processes. While 4067 does not mandate changes, it calls for a public process to explore changes that are highly successful in other states.
2. Provide access to intervenor funding for groups that represent low-income and other underrepresented customers. While this funding is only a start to the sort of changes necessary to ensure the inclusion and innovation our energy system require, it will provide opportunities to support customers who can be left out of decision-making processes.

These elements will protect residential ratepayers, improve services to customers and increase the inclusiveness of decision making at the PUC. We urge you to support 4067.

Sincerely,



Wendy Gerlitz
Policy Director



Heather Moline
Energy & Environmental Justice Policy Associate