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To: Members of the Senate Committee On Energy and Environment
From: Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon/Oregon Interfaith Power & Light

Re: **EMO/OIPL supports HB 2475-A**

April 22, 2021

Chair Beyer, Vice-Chair Findley, and members of the Committee:

Through eight service programs and a membership of 15 denominations and over 150 congregations, organizations, and interfaith partners, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) and Oregon Interfaith Power & Light (OIPL) serve hundreds of thousands of Oregonians all across the state. Informed by our service to under-resourced Oregonians and by our faith values, **EMO/OIPL believes that all Oregonians deserve energy that is ethically-sourced, environmentally sustainable, affordable and accessible.**

EMO/OIPL strongly supports HB 2475-A, the Energy Affordability Act, which will make energy more accessible and affordable for Oregon's energy-burdened communities. This bill, which is desperately overdue after failing to pass in past sessions, will provide essential, long-term relief to primarily rural, low-income and BIPOC communities by allowing utilities to provide flexible rate structures. It will also allow the organizations that know these communities best to advocate effectively on their behalf before the Public Utility Commission (PUC).

For months, EMO has advocated at the PUC alongside many partners for the humane treatment of ratepayers struggling with energy bills, including an extension of the Covid-related moratorium and robust Arrearage Management Plans. **However, these are only temporary solutions to the long-standing problem of energy burden, which will likely be even worse than before the pandemic once the moratorium is lifted.** In 2018, around 433,000 Oregon households were energy-burdened, meaning they spent over 6% of their monthly income on energy bills.¹ These households were disproportionately rural and disproportionately low-income. The three most energy-burdened counties were Malheur County, Lake County, and Wheeler County, where almost 50% of residents experienced energy burden. Among low-income households, some families had to spend 38% of their monthly income on energy bills alone.

Allowing Oregonians to spend over a third of their monthly income on a basic necessity is scandalous. This bill will mitigate the injustice of power shutoffs due to an inability to pay.

¹ Oregon Energy Fund, "New Data Shines a Light on Oregon's Energy Burden," March 26, 2019, <https://www.oregonenergyfund.org/oregon-energy-burden-study/>.

This bill also frees up important resources for community-based organizations that represent energy-burdened communities. There are many organizations across the state that represent environmental justice communities, low-income communities, and other communities facing unaffordable energy costs. These organizations need access to existing programs that fund the research, time and consultation required to participate fully in regulatory proceedings. **HB 2475-A will allow community-based utility customer advocates to access the same funding that general utility customer advocates currently receive.**

As people of faith, we affirm the God-given dignity of every person, and we believe that access to affordable utilities is an essential part of respecting human dignity. We know that those whose right to affordable utilities is denied are those whom our society systematically excludes and oppresses in countless other ways. We join our voices with those in the Oregon Clean Energy Opportunity campaign in insisting that Oregon's energy be clean, affordable, and affirmative of human dignity.

We hope and pray your legislative deliberations maintain focus on caring for low-income Oregonians, especially energy-burdened families and communities, and we pray for your health and safety in this time of pandemic. Know that your gatherings are covered in our prayers as you represent us and make decisions that shape our collective future.

Sincerely yours,

The Rev. Richenda Fairhurst, Member of EMO's Creation Justice Committee
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon/Oregon Interfaith Power & Light