



Office of Sustainability

April 22, 2021

Senator Lee Beyer, Chair
Senate Committee on Energy and Environment
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE, HR B
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Multnomah County Strongly Support HB 2475-A

Chair Beyer and Members of the Committee:

The Multnomah County Office of Sustainability asks for your support of House Bill 2475-A, a thoughtful approach to giving voice to and protecting Oregon's most vulnerable communities. We encourage you to vote yes on HB 2475-A and to reject the -A11 amendment.

Differentiated rates are key to addressing the disproportionate energy burden that low-income Oregonians face. Multnomah County is proud of our low-income energy assistance and weatherization programs that support the well-being of our community members each day. However, those programs are not enough to ensure energy access for our most vulnerable residents. We need the path for differentiated utility rates that HB 2475-A creates.

Without HB 2475-A, a significant portion of Oregonians will continue to suffer the impacts of energy poverty and have to make choices like whether to pay for food or medical care and for an energy bill.¹ Indeed, energy burden impacts many Oregonians,² and disproportionately impacts vulnerable communities.³ COVID-19 and the associated economic downturn have exacerbated

¹ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Lights Out in the Cold: Reforming Utility Shut-Off Policies as If Human Rights Matter* at 13-14 (Mar. 2017),

https://naacp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Lights-Out-in-the-Cold_NAACP-ECJP-4.pdf.

² Oregon Department of Energy, *2020 Biennial Energy Report* at 102 (Nov. 2020) (“The annual Home Energy Figure Affordability Gap (HEAG) . . . found that 521,937 out of 1,591,835 Oregon households are estimated to be struggling to pay their energy bills, which indicates nearly 33 percent of Oregonians are home energy burdened. In addition, 100,456 households with incomes below 50 percent of the Federal Poverty Level paid an average of 23 percent of their annual income for their home energy bills.”).

³ *Id.* at 101 (“[l]ow-income households, Black, Hispanic, Native American, renters, and older adult households all have disproportionately higher home energy burdens than the national median household. Note that many highly burdened groups are intersectional, meaning that they can face compounding, intersecting causes of inequality and injustice, with energy burden potentially representing just one facet of inequity.”).

energy poverty and energy insecurity in Oregon⁴ while compounding existing inequities.⁵ HB 2475-A helps protect energy access for the most vulnerable members of our community, access is necessary for their ability to live, thrive, and participate in society.

HB 2475-A enhances equity for Oregon customers of regulated utilities. SB 978 (2017) led to a process at the Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) focused on the changing utility regulation landscape. Multnomah County participated in this process that sought to include and value perspectives from a wide range of participants. The SB 978 process highlighted that communities that have historically lacked opportunity to engage at the PUC are essential in the transition to a clean, equitable, and just energy system. By resourcing those communities' participation at the PUC, HB 2475-A helps inform more equitable outcomes.

We urge you to vote yes on HB 2475-A and to reject the -A11 amendment. The -A11 amendment would harm utility customers by allowing customer groups to rely on intervenor funding solely for issues related to energy utilities' rates, terms, and conditions. As testimony by the Oregon Citizens' Utility Board highlights, such a restriction would leave the interests of Oregon utility customers unrepresented or underrepresented in a myriad of proceedings. For that reason, we encourage you to vote yes on HB 2475-A as originally proposed.

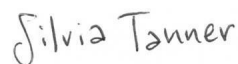
HB 2475-A is the right approach for Oregon, and the Multnomah County Office of Sustainability looks forward to working with the Legislature, PUC, utilities, and the broad diversity of stakeholders to put HB 2475-A into practice and advance a just energy transition in the state.

We appreciate your consideration of these comments and ask for your support of HB 2475-A.

Sincerely,



John Wasiutynski
Director
john.wasiutynski@multco.us



Silvia Tanner
Senior Sustainability Analyst
silvia.tanner@multco.us

⁴ Oregon Public Utility Commission, *COVID-19 Arrears Data*,
<https://www.oregon.gov/puc/utilities/Documents/COVID-Impacts-ArrearsData.pdf>.

⁵ Multnomah County, *New numbers show COVID-19 damage to communities of color; leaders call for better data collection* (May 1, 2020),
<https://multco.us/novel-coronavirus-covid-19/news/new-numbers-show-covid-19-damage-communities-color-leaders-call>; Pew Research Center, *Financial and health impacts of COVID-19 vary widely by race and ethnicity* (May 5, 2020)
<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/05/05/financial-and-health-impacts-of-covid-19-vary-widely-by-race-and-ethnicity/>.