



**Testimony in Support of HB 2475**

April 22, 2021

Chair Beyer and Members of the Senate Committee on Energy and Environment,

My name is Khanh Pham, Representative for House District 46. As one of the chief sponsors, I am honored to speak today in support of HB 2475.

I was proud to see that we passed this bill with bipartisan support in the House earlier in the session. The need for HB 2475 clear -- **low-income payers need relief from high energy bills**. Low income families pay as much as 38% of their income toward paying for utilities, a rate that is not sustainable when families also need to pay for rent, childcare, food, and other basic needs. We have a lot of folks here today who will share about what this will mean for families to lift this burden amid what has already been an incredibly difficult past 12 months.

The second part of HB 2475 is providing intervenor funding to allow participation by environmental justice communities in Public Utility Commission meetings and to ensure that the communities most impacted by our energy system have a voice in the PUC.

When we talk about environmental justice communities, we are explicitly including rural communities. And when EJ groups come together to advocate in the PUC, they advocate for things--like this low-income rate for utilities--that will help rural communities.

Before I joined the Legislature, in my job as a community organizer with the Oregon Just Transition Alliance, I was privileged to be able to work with frontline rural communities. And we found that, despite the divisive rhetoric pitting rural and urban communities against each other, we have so much in common in terms of what our communities need.

This bill is a perfect example of what our communities need most, particularly now.

In my work with the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon, I saw that community members turned to community organizations in times of crisis or when they need additional support. In past hearings, we have heard that grassroots communities have struggled to make their voices heard in decisions that impacted their lives and the lives of those they serve. Grassroots organizations can help to bridge the gap to allow community members to access decision-making tables.

To fund EJ intervenors, it only costs 1.3 cents per user per month--just over a penny a month-- for something that will provide substantial savings for low-income Oregon households. Through productive conversations in the House Committee on Energy and Environment, the -8 amendment was adopted to build strong sideboards for how intervenor funding will be allocated and to add reporting requirements for that funding.

Through this legislation, we can address the high utility bills that burden low-income families and make a stronger, more equitable Public Utilities Commission that is informed by the communities who are among the most impacted by the PUC's decisions.

I hope that we can also unite around this policy which will provide energy affordability and access to Oregonians across the state. Oregonians need our help, let's pass HB 2475 and make sure that they get the help they need.