



February 22, 2021

Chair Marsh, Vice-Chair's Helm and Brock Smith, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Community Action Partnership of Oregon (CAPO), I would like to express our support for House Bill 3141, which will continue existing programs and increase funding for critical energy assistance throughout the state. We want to thank Representative Marsh and electric utilities for their leadership on this effort to temporarily increase low-income electric bill payment and crisis assistance by \$10 million annually through 2023.

The recent snow and ice storm that left more than 330,000 Oregonians without power was a reminder of the importance of electricity in our daily life. For many Oregonians struggling to keep the lights on, affordable energy is an unfortunate burden. This past year, our network assisted 21,500 Oregon households who were unable to pay energy bills, with emergency COVID-19 assistance. Throughout the state, we are seeing a tremendous need for assistance to prevent energy utility shut-offs, which has only increased in the midst of today's public health crisis and recent catastrophic wildfires. For many Oregonians, this legislation will help alleviate this burden.

Due to the increased need and economic challenges caused by the public health pandemic, we would encourage the committee to look at applying the same standards to all energy assistance programs. We found the allocation of \$15 million in additional federal funds last Spring through the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program to be extremely successful. With the biggest barrier to gaining assistance for people of color being access, this streamlined approach removed hurdles to enrollment and increased access to include Oregonians unable to get assistance in existing programs, which we believe is a good model. Aligning the standards of the Oregon Energy Assistance Program to also expand income eligibility and benefit levels will streamline the process, increase flexibility and help get additional resources out to struggling families in this unprecedented time of need.

We ask that you join our network in supporting this legislation to help provide assistance to help low-income Oregonians facing delinquent electrical utility accounts.

Sincerely,

Janet Merrell

Janet Merrell
Executive Director