

Good morning Chair Marsh, Vice Chair's and Committee members. I'm Ben Duncan, a constituent of District 41 and a founding appointee and former Chair of the Oregon Environmental Justice Task Force. I'm also here today in my capacity as the liaison to the EJTF from the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs. I'm grateful to have a few moments today to offer comments on HB 2475 focused on energy affordability. I also want to clarify that I am not here to support or oppose the legislation formally, but to speak to the importance of environmental justice considerations and practice in legislation attempting to address the environmental challenges we face as a state.

The Legislature in 2008 established state law in Oregon that sought to protect EJ communities from disproportionate environmental hazard and impact. The Public Utility Commission was designated among the 14 natural resource agencies that are required to consider environmental justice when making decisions. The application of environmental justice, which includes principles outlined in statute, include identifying and engaging urban and rural EJ communities, communities of color, and other vulnerable communities that suffer from low incomes, lack of job opportunities, energy and food insecurity, houselessness, and environmental degradation. Agencies are also required to submit annual reports to the EJTF and the legislation's specific direction to meet this requirement, with a focus on the findings from public process, is a powerful way to ensure accountability and transparency.

Some of you have heard me before use the EJ adage that communities that speak for themselves best protect themselves, and by embedding definitions, expectations and resource in the legislation, the bill will help ensure that voices of environmental justice communities--defined within the legislation--are heard-- by resourcing community organizations to build capacity in EJ communities in order to best represent the diverse needs in the often complex workings of the Oregon Public Utility Commission.

HB 2475 also recognizes the ways that energy costs impact Oregonians across the state, and seeks to address the disproportionate burden that low income members of our communities face. As we move to transition our energy economy, we have to ensure that we don't do so at the cost of our low income, communities of color, and other vulnerable populations who experience energy burden. These costs mean unfair and unjust choices between basic necessities like food and medical care and safe and healthy living environments.

The EJTF has an overall interest and vision for improving *how* the State goes about its business to ensure meaningful involvement and effective and thorough analysis of EJ when making decisions, and this bill is a really powerful example of legislation that accurately defines, and sets a vision for the ways we can effectively make sure that environmental justice is a reality for Oregonians.

Thank you for this opportunity to come before you. On behalf of my colleagues on the EJTF we would welcome additional opportunities to have robust conversations, informed by our partnerships with state agencies, community based organizations, the Advocacy Commissions, and the Governor's Office, to talk more specifically about how to ensure that this, and other legislation like it, effectively advances environmental justice and ensures the ability for every Oregonian to live, thrive and effectively participate.

Happy to answer any questions