

To: House Committee on Energy and Environment

From: Twila Jacobsen, co-chair, SEIU503 Climate Justice Committee

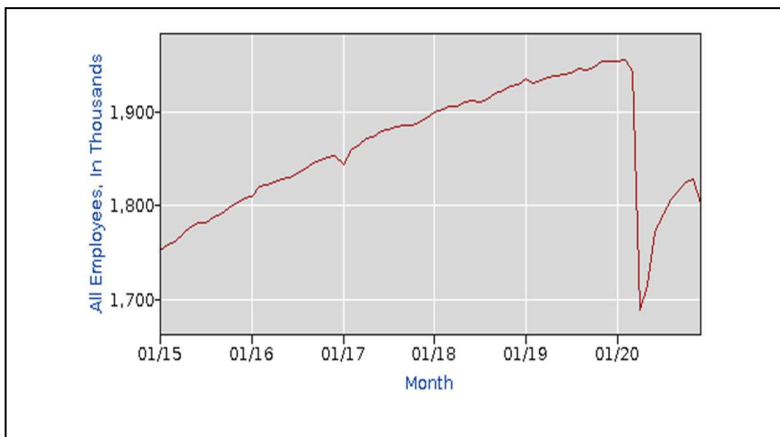
Date: February 1, 2021

Re: Testimony in favor of HB 2475 Authorizes Public Utility Commission to consider differential energy burden and other inequities of affordability in rates.

I am writing to submit testimony in favor of HB2475. There is no doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent economic decline will continue to impact the Oregon economy. The U.S. economy contracted 3.5 per cent in 2020, the Commerce Department reported Thursday, the worst economic freeze since the end of the Second World War. In Oregon Non-Farm Wage and Salary Employment decreased by 7.8% (Preliminary) in 2020.

<https://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.or.htm>.

There is no question that the pressure on households to cover the costs of living is leading to greater food insecurity, more crowded living conditions, and large increases in the houseless population. This is hitting hardest the lower paid service sectors, including homecare, personal support and



childcare workers as well as the restaurant and food service workforce which is made up of a greater percentage of people of color and lower income workers.

As an Outreach Worker for Sr. and Disability Services in Lane County, I provided assistance to seniors and people with disabilities through the Federal funding of the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP). I met many folks who were faced with high “energy burden.” They spent a larger portion of their income on home energy costs (e.g., electricity, natural gas, and other home heating fuels) than other households spent. High energy burdens force tough choices between paying energy bills and buying food, medicine, or other essentials. Those on fixed incomes, i.e. Social Security and Disability, were also facing increases to rent, food, and medical costs, as well as often living in older homes and apartments that did not have efficient appliances or windows. The level of assistance did not grow over the years even though more people were meeting the eligibility criteria of household income below 60% of median income. This bill will provide a needed boost to Oregonians and give the PUC greater ability to regard the unique and challenging issues of low income customers and environmental justice communities.

The House Summary provided to the Committee specially notes that this bill ...”would allow the PUC to consider differential energy burden and other inequities of affordability in rates.” There is research and programs that are directly working with community organizations and communities at highest risk of environmental and health hazards, as outlined in the publication from the U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2019/01/f58/WIP-Energy-Burden_final.pdf. Please consider these in your deliberations.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide this statement to your Committee.