



March 28, 2023

House Committee on Climate, Energy & Environment
900 Court Street NW
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Support for HB 3459 with -4 and -5 Amendments

Dear Chair Marsh, Vice Chair Bobby Levy, Vice Chair Emerson Levy, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Community Action Partnership (CAPO), which represents a network of 17 Oregon community action agencies and a special purpose organization, the Oregon Human Development Corporation. Our organizations plan, implement and deliver anti-poverty programs across all of Oregon's 36 counties, including homeless shelters, food banks, and Head Start. Our network is responsible for implementing OEAP, as well as other federally and utility-funded energy assistance programs.

We are writing to express our support for the proposed increase in OEAP funding, as outlined in HB 3459 with the -4 and -5 amendments. OEAP is an important supplement to federally funded energy assistance programs, which only serve a small portion of the eligible population (around 12%). Last fiscal year, we were able to serve around 24,500 households with OEAP funds. We distribute this assistance in equitable and culturally-responsive ways in all areas of the state that receive power through PGE or PAC. Most non-white ethnic/racial groups have above mean participation rates; we conduct effective outreach in rural and tribal communities; and partner with other community-based organizations.

OEAP funding was initially increased to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic has eased, the need for assistance remains strong due to the substantial increase in the general cost of living, including the cost of electricity, which has risen significantly. PAC residential customers saw their average bills increase by 21% in January 2023. PGE is proposing an average residential rate increase of 15% in its current rate case. This means, despite more available assistance, for instance bill discount programs, low-income households are more burdened than ever. This bill is a good step in the direction of containing this raising burden and helping more of those in need.

Importantly, assistance for energy is about more than just paying electricity bills. Families on the margins make tough decisions every day over which bills they can afford, and what essentials they have to forgo. Energy assistance alleviates this stress, helping low-income households to stay warm and healthy. It is also an essential part of keeping families affordably housed.



Oregon's Poverty Fighting Network

In the long run, we would like to see legislators, regulators, and utilities expand and streamline disparate energy- assistance programs to make energy more affordable for more Oregonians and ease the administrative burden of participation.

In closing, we would ask you to support HB 3459 as amended.

Thank you for your consideration,

Benedikt Springer
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Community Action Partnership of Oregon