



March 29, 2023

Representative Pam Marsh, Chair
House Committee on Energy and Environment
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE, Room D
Salem, OR 97301

Re: The Multnomah County Support for HB 3459

Chair Marsh and Members of the Committee:

The Multnomah County Health Department, Department of County Human Services, and Office of Sustainability ask for your support for maintaining funding for energy assistance that is responsive to the levels of energy insecurity in our community. HB 3459, with the -4 or -5 amendments, would direct the PUC to continue to collect increased funds for energy assistance through 2026. Oregon adopted current funding levels in recognition of the increase in energy insecurity catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Today, many Oregon households remain energy insecure thanks to climate and economic factors that increase their need for energy while worsening their financial reality. Your support of the -4 or -5 amendments to HB 3459 would allow energy assistance providers to continue to better meet the needs of Oregonians experiencing energy insecurity.

Multnomah County is committed to building equity and justice in our community by transforming systems, affecting policies, meeting the needs of overlooked communities, and making strategic investments. As a weatherization and energy assistance provider, we have seen first hand both the high need for energy assistance and the difference it can make for those who need it. The increased funding levels that the -4 or -5 amendments to HB 3459 would maintain have allowed us to serve more people and to better meet their needs. With that increased funding, we have been able to serve a total of 2,630 clients to date. We have also been able to pay off high arrearages for people who could otherwise be stuck carrying debt they could not escape, something we can only do thanks to the increased funding. The -4 or -5 amendments to HB 3459 would allow us to continue to respond to the increased need for energy assistance and help community members experiencing disconnection, at risk of being disconnected, and at risk of a disconnection-related eviction.

Maintaining increased funding for energy assistance could especially benefit vulnerable households in the event of extreme heat such as the heat dome event of 2021. In a review of the 2021 Heat Dome, Multnomah County determined that of those who died more than 50% lived in apartments or multi-family dwellings and 78% lived alone and lacked air conditioning. By preventing disconnections and allowing people to use the energy they need to be safe, the passage of this bill has the potential to keep Oregonians safe and healthy through all conditions, especially as climate hazards become more frequent and intense. Utility shut offs can be extremely disruptive to families, and the loss of energy services such as lighting, heating, cooling, and food preservation can have severe negative impacts on finances, health, and safety of at-risk families.

We look forward to continuing to engage in important conversations taking place about how to holistically support Oregonians experiencing energy insecurity. We appreciate your consideration of these comments and ask for your support of HB 3459, with the -4 or -5 amendments.

Sincerely,



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Director
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Multnomah County



Silvia Tanner
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Multnomah County



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