



www.RogueClimate.org || PO Box 1980, Phoenix, OR 97535 || 541-301-9204

Coos Bay Office: 243 S. 2nd St. Coos Bay, OR 97420 || 541- 816-0758

Re: Rogue Climate Testimony regarding SB 88

Dear Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Brock Smith, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on SB 88: Relating to expenditures nonrecoverable from ratepayers; declaring an emergency.

Rogue Climate serves and works alongside Southern Oregon and South Coast communities most impacted by climate change, including low-income, rural, youth, and communities of color, by organizing for clean energy, sustainable jobs, and a healthy environment. We do so through leadership development, political education, and campaigns for policies that benefit our communities.

Far too many people in Oregon are struggling to pay their energy bills. Since 2021, the state's largest for-profit utilities have raised residential billing rates by nearly 50% while for-profit utility company profits continue to soar. A [2024 ACEEE study](#) found that households that identify as low-income, African American, Latinx, or Native are more likely to be energy burdened and face a higher energy burden than the average household. Households in rural communities are also more likely to be energy burdened, with [30-39% of households](#) in Jackson and Coos county facing severe energy burdens while also earning [less than \\$15,060 per year](#).

The increasing prevalence of extreme weather events further burdens community members in Southern Oregon and the South Coast, underscoring the need for energy affordability and resilience as climate change impacts continue. While serving as the service provider for the Community Heat Pump Deployment Program in Jackson County, the Rogue Climate team has heard first hand the stories of community members struggling to pay their utility bills. Many of the families we are serving have small children in the home and are facing the choice between using plug-in heaters to warm at night or sleep in a cold home to save money. Loss of power during winter often forces families to rely on dangerous heating methods, such as generators or gas ovens, putting them at risk for carbon monoxide poisoning. When fear of a high energy bill forces someone to switch off cooling in the summer or heating in the winter, that's not resilience, that's a dangerous injustice.

Expenses like lawyers, lobbyists, advertising, and industry fees should be paid from company profits, not our utility bills. These costs can add millions of dollars of "junk" to our bills each year and should not include the utility company's efforts to further its corporate agenda, whether it's through litigation aimed at overturning important climate protection laws or funding expensive advertising campaigns to improve its brand image. When customers are already grappling with skyrocketing bills, it's unjust to make them foot the bill for corporate interests that do nothing to address their real needs, like reliable, affordable energy. SB 88 will ensure



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that these costs come from profits, not ratepayers pockets who are already struggling with rapidly increasing bills.

It is clear that community members overwhelmingly want to transition away from fossil fuels and towards safer and healthier energy systems. Over the past month, a gas industry front-group with ties to Avista has been spreading misinformation in an attempt to block climate policy led by Rogue Climate's youth action team in Ashland. At the same time, Avista is requesting another rate increase at the Public Utility Commission. This is not what customers are paying for. Utilities should be focused on providing essential services to meet community needs, rather than using ratepayer funds to spread misinformation and block policies that protect residents from pollution and climate impacts.

The current practice of utilities using ratepayer funds for corporate interests, like lobbying and advertising, is unjust and unsustainable. It is essential that we increase transparency, ensuring customers understand what they are paying for. SB 88 is a crucial step toward holding these for-profit utilities accountable by ensuring that unnecessary expenses are paid from company profits, not from the pockets of Oregon families. As we continue to advocate for clean energy and climate policies, it is vital that we prioritize the needs of our communities and work towards a fairer, more resilient energy future for all Oregonians. Please vote in support of SB 88.

Sincerely,

Jess Grady-Benson, Organizing Director

Zöe Serrano, Legislative Coordinator