

3/3/2025

Testimony in support of SB 88

Senate Committee on Energy and the Environment

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

**My name is Sam Guthman, my pronouns are she/her and I am the Policy Manager and Lead Lobbyist at APANO Communities United Fund (CUF) and APANO Action Fund (AF), sibling, culturally-specific organizations that unites Asians and Pacific Islanders to build power, develop leaders and advance equity through organizing, advocacy, community development and cultural work. I urge you today to support SB 88: a crucial step toward holding utility companies accountable and ensuring that working families are not unfairly burdened with excessive energy costs.**

**For years, utility companies have exploited ratepayers by passing on costs unrelated to essential services, including executive bonuses, lobbying efforts, and advertising expenses. These practices disproportionately impact low-income households, particularly communities of color who already face economic hardships. SB 88 ensures that utility companies prioritize affordability and transparency over profit-driven interests.**

- **Preventing Unjust Rate Hikes:** Utility companies should not be allowed to raise rates to cover unnecessary expenses while working families struggle to pay their bills. SB 88 stops these corporations from passing those costs onto consumers.
- **Protecting Vulnerable Communities:** Many AANHPI households, along with other BIPOC and low-income families, already face energy insecurity. This bill ensures fair pricing and prevents further financial strain.
- **Demanding Transparency:** SB 88 requires greater oversight of utility spending, ensuring that companies cannot misuse ratepayer money for corporate perks and political influence.
- **Holding Corporations Accountable:** Utility companies operate as monopolies, leaving customers with little choice. SB 88 levels the playing field by enforcing stricter regulations and prioritizing consumer protection.
- **Lowering Costs for Families:** Ensuring fair energy pricing allows families to allocate resources toward other basic needs, such as food, healthcare, and education.

- Preventing Corporate Greed: Limiting what utility companies can charge ratepayers helps curb unjust enrichment at the expense of working families.
- Building a More Equitable Oregon: By protecting consumers from corporate abuse, SB 88 contributes to a fairer, more just economy for all.

**At APANO, community members frequently come to us for help understanding and translating their everyday bills. However, the most outrage and confusion we hear is about utility bills. Even families enrolled in low-income discount programs struggle to keep up with the rising costs, asking us why electricity rates keep increasing so frequently. How are these companies allowed to charge me for things I didn't use or agree to? In a system that already disadvantages non-native English speakers, how does our community fight this injustice? How do public utilities justify exploiting a global pandemic to charge struggling families even more, as we know rates have exponentially increased since 2020?**

**Too often, the only answer we can provide is: 'We are working on it.' The feeling of hopelessness you have when pointing out all the fees on a poor families utility bills, and having to explain that they are legally allowed to charge you for their own political agenda is nothing short of heartbreaking and rage-inducing. Your constituents deserve to know what they didn't sign up to pay. After years of urging commissions, committees, and boards to consider the real-life impact of their decisions, I stand before you today with the same ask: people over profit.**

**SB 88 is a critical step in stopping utility companies from exploiting Oregonians and ensuring that all communities, especially those most impacted by financial hardship, have access to fair and affordable energy services. We urge the committee to stand with working families and pass SB 88.**

Thank you,  
Sam Guthman  
Policy Manager  
APANO Communities United Fund