



March 23, 2025

**Support for HB 3792**

Dear Chair Sosa and Members of the Committee,

I'm Kemp Shuey, Executive Director of Community Action in Washington County and I am writing in support of House Bill 3792. HB 3792 will double the funding for the Oregon Energy Assistance Program (OEAP). OEAP is a state-administered energy assistance program for PGE and Pacific Power customers that helps low-income households of these utilities avoid disconnection when they are unable to pay their past-due bills.

Community Action is a nonprofit dedicated to eliminating conditions of poverty and we have been the leading provider of energy assistance services in Washington County for decades. Since 2021, customers have seen their household energy bill increase by nearly 50%, and funding for energy assistance programs have not kept up. Consequently, nearly 58,000 households in the combined service area of PGE and Pacific Power were disconnected in 2024. Of those nearly 10,000 were low-income households already participating in a bill discount program. Our community needs increased funding for OEAP to meet the demand for energy assistance services which are higher than ever.

At Community Action, we know that energy assistance makes a transformation impact on the people we serve. Clients we serve are stressed out beyond belief when they receive a disconnection notice. We hear stories like this one regularly:

*Yesterday, late in the day I had called PGE to beg them not to turn my electric off until at least the next Monday, but please not right before the weekend. When I was inquiring about it, they had said no bill was due and no payment needs to be made, I was very confused. Then they had explained that Community Action had made a "promise to pay" to them on my behalf and that I would not be getting my electric shut off at all. I about cried in relief and thank fullness on the spot. Such a large sigh of relief overcame me, I teared up. I want to thank you so much for this and was very happily surprised last night at this. I*

*Community Action leads the way to eliminate conditions of poverty and creates opportunities for people and communities to thrive.*

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*cannot thank you enough and the stress you have relieved from me. I cannot thank you enough, thank you so much, thank you.*

In 2024, Community Action served 5,509 households and 14,627 individuals in Washington County thanks to OEAP. Additionally, we reconnected 413 households that had been shut off due to nonpayment and prevented 668 disconnections from happening. The need for increased funding of OEAP is urgent, as rapidly increasing energy costs are driving up demand, and the stability of federal sources like the Low-Income Heating and Energy Assistance (LIHEAP) remain uncertain.

OEAP is a program by customers for customers. Funded by a small charge on the bills of customers of PGE and Pacific Power, these funds are only available to income-eligible households of those utilities. Customers must be below 60% of state median income to qualify and they must provide documentation of their energy costs. Payments go directly to the utility, not the customer. Most significantly, OEAP gives priority to customers at risk of being disconnected, which allows us to respond quickly in a time of crisis.

Access to electricity is a fundamental need of everyone in our community. It heats and cools our homes, keeps the lights on, powers life-saving medical equipment, and sustains the connection to the internet. By supporting HB 3792, you can ensure that thousands more households will be protected from unnecessary disconnections. Thank you for your support and consideration.

With gratitude,

Kemp Shuey, Executive Director