

**Testimony of the Oregon Human Development Corporation (OHDC)
Submitted to the Oregon House Committee on Commerce and Consumer
Protection
Re: House Bill 3792 – Proposed Amendments**



March 2025

Chair Representative Nathan Sosa, Vice-Chairs, and Members of the Committee:

For over four decades, the Oregon Human Development Corporation (OHDC) has stood alongside Oregon’s farmworkers—workers whose labor fuels our state’s agricultural economy, but who too often face disproportionate barriers to stability and opportunity. We work every day with these communities, helping them navigate challenges related to housing, employment, and basic utilities.

House Bill 3792 takes a meaningful step forward by proposing an increase in energy assistance funding—from \$20 million to \$40 million annually. This boost is long overdue and will help close the gap between what families need and what support has historically been available. We appreciate this effort. At the same time, we want to share some perspectives from the ground and offer a few suggestions for strengthening the bill’s impact.

When the Heat Is On—and the Paychecks Aren’t

Farmworker households experience something unique and deeply challenging: their income drops precisely when their need for electricity peaks. Harvest season brings work and wages, but during the coldest months, jobs all but disappear—and with them, the ability to cover rising electric bills.

Many of the families we serve live in older, poorly insulated homes. Electricity isn’t just a utility—it’s a lifeline during Central Oregon winters. When income dries up and bills stack up, people face impossible choices: skip rent? Cut back on groceries? Let the heat go?

A Story from Madras

Consider Maria and José. They live in Madras, a town nestled in one of Oregon’s rural agricultural regions. José works in seasonal crop production, while Maria picks up shifts as a kitchen worker at a local restaurant. When work is steady, their income reaches around \$3,000 a month. But during the off-season, they bring in less than half that—and that’s when their electric bills soar.

One winter, their utility bill climbed to nearly \$400. Maria told us they delayed paying rent just to keep the heat on for their three kids. They do everything right—work hard, budget carefully—but there’s no safety net strong enough to catch them when the bills are more than they can bear.

"Empowering Farmworkers: Growing Skills, Cultivating Success

Their story isn't unusual. We hear versions of it all across rural Oregon when talking about the burden of high energy bills.

What's Working—and What Could Work Better

We're encouraged by the proposed increase in funding. That's a critical move toward equity and support for communities like Maria and José's.

We also support the bill's requirement for the Public Utility Commission to reassess rates every two years.

What We Recommend

1. **Focus support on workers with seasonal income**, like farmworkers, who often face their greatest financial strain when energy needs are highest.
2. **Set reasonable, transparent limits** on how program costs are shared with low-income customers. Without clear guardrails, even well-meaning programs can lead to unintended burdens.
3. **Invest in long-term solutions**, like energy efficiency upgrades for older rental homes. These kinds of improvements pay off by reducing monthly bills and decreasing reliance on emergency assistance.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these reflections. OHDC looks forward to working with you and others across the state to make sure energy policy works for everyone—especially those who make Oregon's agricultural industry possible.

Respectfully,



Martin Campos-Davis
Executive Director
Oregon Human Development Corporation

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