

TESTIMONY OF
JAMES P. GRIFFIN, Ph.D.
CHAIR, PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
STATE OF HAWAII

TO THE
SENATE COMMITTEES ON
COMMERCE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION
AND
ENERGY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND TOURISM

March 22, 2022
10:15 a.m.

Chair Baker, Chair Wakai, and Members of the Committees:

MEASURE: S.C.R. No. 48 / S.R. 43

TITLE: REQUESTING THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION TO CONSIDER EFFORTS TO MITIGATE HIGH ENERGY BURDENS FOR LOW- AND MODERATE-INCOME CUSTOMERS AND INVESTIGATE HOW TO INTEGRATE CONSIDERATIONS OF ENERGY EQUITY AND JUSTICE ACROSS ITS WORK.

POSITION:

The Public Utilities Commission (“Commission”) supports these resolutions and offers the following comments for consideration.

COMMENTS:

The Commission supports these resolutions, which intend to reduce energy burdens on LMI customers and other customer groups.

The Commission recognizes that utility costs are a source of financial strain for many LMI customers and has prioritized cost reductions and affordability in many of its proceedings, including general rate cases, power purchase agreements for low-cost renewable energy projects, and innovative programs such as the demand response portfolio that reduces costs to customers. In addition, in overseeing the efforts of the Public Benefits Fee Administrator (“Hawaii Energy”), the Commission has emphasized the importance of energy efficiency programs and services for hard-to-reach customers, including LMI customers.

The Commission will continue to support and develop reasonable measures that lessen the burden of energy costs on LMI customers and other customer groups, while integrating energy equity and justice throughout its work.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



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Testimony of the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs

**Before the
Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection
And
Senate Committee on Energy, Economic Development, and Tourism
Tuesday, March 22, 2022
10:15 AM
Conference Room 229 & Videoconference**

On the following measure:

**SCR 48/SR 43, REQUESTING THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION TO
CONSIDER EFFORTS TO MITIGATE HIGH ENERGY BURDENS FOR LOW- AND
MODERATE-INCOME CUSTOMERS AND INVESTIGATE HOW TO INTEGRATE
CONSIDERATIONS OF ENERGY EQUITY AND JUSTICE ACROSS ITS WORK**

Chairs Baker and Wakai and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dean Nishina, and I am the Executive Director of the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs' (Department) Division of Consumer Advocacy. The Department supports this resolution.

The purpose of this resolution is to request the Public Utilities Commission to consider efforts to mitigate high energy burdens for low- and moderate-income customers and investigate how to integrate considerations of energy equity and justice across its work.

Low-income households spend a larger percentage of their income on home energy costs making them vulnerable to energy insecurity. The COVID pandemic has caused significant economic hardship further increasing energy insecurity for low-

income as well as moderate-income households. This has resulted in a large increase in the number of households throughout the state that are now eligible for disconnection from electricity service. And while many households have received utility bill payment assistance during the COVID pandemic made possible by the federal government through programs such as the Emergency Rental Assistance program, these programs are only temporary and once closed will leave more low-income and moderate-income households vulnerable to disconnection.

The Department recognizes that certain communities, especially those in economically challenged areas, have shouldered the burden of hosting large renewable energy projects. As these projects have come before the Public Utilities Commission for approval, the Department has consistently recommended that more outreach, education and community benefits be provided by the renewable project developers to offset the burden being placed on these communities. The Department has also pushed for early and meaningful engagement so that a community's concerns can be adequately addressed. In addition, many of the programs meant to encourage adoption of new technologies tend to favor those households that are more affluent and have ready access to capital. While these programs and technologies help participating customers, vulnerable households do not have the same ability as other customers to take advantage of new programs and technology and could face even greater electricity bills resulting from these programs. Thus, the Department understands that more work needs to be done to bring energy equity to these communities and customers.

The Department appreciates the legislature's focus on energy equity and believes this is an important step in supporting our communities and families.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this resolution.