
HOUSE RESOLUTION

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

1 WHEREAS, many households in Hawaii have difficulty paying
2 energy bills and suffer energy insecurity, in which they are
3 faced with difficult choices, such as whether to sacrifice food
4 or medicine to be able to pay for energy; and

5
6 WHEREAS, the Department of Business, Economic Development,
7 and Tourism found that "household electricity burden - the
8 percentage of household income spent on electricity bills - is
9 one of the key elements contributing to a household's energy
10 insecurity, especially for low-income households"; and

11
12 WHEREAS, consequently, households with lower incomes are
13 faced with higher levels of energy insecurity; and

14
15 WHEREAS, forty-two percent of households in the State live
16 below the ALICE (asset limited, income constrained, employed)
17 threshold, meaning that almost half of all families in Hawaii
18 are struggling to make ends meet, even though they are employed;
19 and

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21 WHEREAS, additionally, nine percent of these ALICE families
22 are living in poverty, and this trend has progressively worsened
23 in recent years due to the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic;
24 and

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26 WHEREAS, rising temperatures and humidity due to climate
27 change have increased the need for air conditioning, resulting
28 in the need for more electricity and further exacerbating the
29 situation of energy insecurity for residents; and
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1 WHEREAS, Hawaii's electricity rates are the highest in the
2 nation, at close to three times the national average; and

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4 WHEREAS, although the federal Low Income Home Energy
5 Assistance Program is available for bill assistance, an average
6 of only twenty percent of qualifying households actually receive
7 benefits, leaving an obvious unmet need for bill assistance or
8 rate relief to those in privation; and

9
10 WHEREAS, the State's electric utilities do not offer
11 utility specific low- to moderate-income discount rates and have
12 limited, if any, bill assistance options; and

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14 WHEREAS, in recognition of these and other disparities
15 contributing to high electricity burdens, some state utilities
16 in Arizona, California, Georgia, Maine, Massachusetts,
17 Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island,
18 and Vermont are authorized to offer lower rates to low- and
19 limited-income customers to reduce residential electricity
20 burden and ensure continued access to electrical power; and

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22 WHEREAS, when comparing electricity burden maps in the
23 Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism's
24 electricity burden report to the Hawaii Statewide Energy Project
25 Directory provided by the Hawaii State Energy Office, a
26 substantial number of the current and planned energy project
27 locations are in or near areas that have higher electricity
28 burdens; and

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30 WHEREAS, the communities that serve as geographic hosts for
31 major energy projects receive the same project benefit of secure
32 provision of service as all other ratepayers, yet must live with
33 the burdens associated with hosting those projects and are
34 neither offered compensation for doing so nor are generally
35 meaningfully engaged in the planning process; and

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37 WHEREAS, the burdens host communities shoulder include high
38 concentrations of particulate air emissions, loss of open space,
39 loss of other land uses, environmental concerns, and projects
40 that are maligned with the host community's localized needs and
41 priorities for provision of electrical service; and

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1 WHEREAS, without intentional and informed planning,
2 progression toward the State's clean energy goals may therefore
3 come at the expense of already burdened communities; and
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5 WHEREAS, current circumstances necessitate an explicit
6 focus on energy and climate justice to ensure that the benefits
7 and burdens of energy infrastructure development in the face of
8 climate change are equitably distributed; and
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10 WHEREAS, the Public Utilities Commission has worked on and
11 continues to work on energy resource issues through its docket
12 proceedings, such as docket no. 2019-0323, which is
13 investigating distributed energy resource policies pertaining to
14 the Hawaiian Electric Companies; now, therefore,
15

16 BE IT RESOLVED by the House of Representatives of the
17 Thirty-first Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session
18 of 2022, that the Public Utilities Commission is requested to
19 consider efforts to mitigate high energy burdens for low- and
20 moderate-income customers and input by the Consumer Advocate and
21 investigate how to integrate considerations of energy equity and
22 justice across its work; and
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24 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Public Utilities Commission
25 is requested to examine:
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- 27 (1) Low- and moderate-income rate discounts, bill credits,
28 and direct payments and whether these would be
29 appropriate in the State;
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- 31 (2) Expanded availability of utility bill assistance
32 programs and whether adequate payment plan
33 arrangements are available to low- and moderate-income
34 customers who are facing economic challenges, such as
35 loss of employment;
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- 37 (3) Measures to protect low- and moderate-income
38 households, senior citizens, and households with
39 infants from service disconnections, including
40 reporting requirements for all utilities on the number
41 of customers annually disconnected due to non-payment;
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1 (4) The advantages and disadvantages of rate design,
2 program offerings, and the requirements of community
3 benefits agreements to address energy burden, energy
4 insecurity, and environmental and energy justice
5 concerns related to energy projects and programs; and
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7 (5) Other customer-centric solutions to lessen the energy
8 burden on low- and moderate-income customers and
9 determine appropriate benefits above and beyond those
10 accrued to the overall electric grid for communities
11 that serve as geographic hosts to utility scale energy
12 projects; and
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14 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Public Utilities Commission
15 is requested to establish the necessary proceeding or
16 proceedings to conduct this examination; provided that the
17 proceedings are not duplicative, but rather focus on the need
18 for integration of energy equity and justice in the ongoing and
19 future work of the Public Utilities Commission; and
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21 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Public Utilities Commission
22 is requested to submit a report to the Legislature of its
23 findings and recommendations, including any proposed
24 legislation, no later than twenty days prior to the convening of
25 the Regular Session of 2023; and
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27 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this
28 Resolution be transmitted to the Chairperson of the Public
29 Utilities Commission and Department of Commerce and Consumer
30 Affairs Consumer Advocate.
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