
SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

REQUESTING THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER ADVOCACY, 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.

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
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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
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12 WHEREAS, consequently, households with lower incomes are
13 faced with higher levels of energy insecurity; and
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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 caused increased need for air conditioning,
28 resulting in the need for more electricity and further



1 exacerbating the situation of energy insecurity for residents;
2 and
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4 WHEREAS, Hawaii's electricity rates are the highest in the
5 nation, at close to three times the national average; and
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7 WHEREAS, although the federal Low Income Home Energy
8 Assistance Program is available for bill assistance, an average
9 of only twenty percent of qualifying households actually receive
10 benefits, leaving an obvious unmet need for bill assistance or
11 rate relief to those in privation; and
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13 WHEREAS, the State's electric utilities do not offer
14 utility specific low- to moderate-income discount rates and have
15 limited, if any, bill assistance options; and
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17 WHEREAS, in recognition of these and other disparities
18 contributing to high electricity burdens, some state utilities
19 in Arizona, California, Georgia, Maine, Massachusetts,
20 Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island,
21 and Vermont are authorized to offer lower rates to low- and
22 limited-income customers to reduce residential electricity
23 burden and ensure continued access to electrical power; and
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25 WHEREAS, when comparing electricity burden maps in the
26 Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism's
27 electricity burden report to the Hawaii Statewide Energy Project
28 Directory provided by the Hawaii State Energy Office, a
29 substantial amount of the current and planned energy project
30 locations are in or near areas that have higher electricity
31 burdens; and
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33 WHEREAS, the communities that serve as geographic hosts for
34 major energy projects receive the same project benefit of secure
35 provision of service as all other ratepayers, yet must live with
36 the burdens associated with hosting those projects and are
37 neither offered compensation for doing so nor are generally
38 meaningfully engaged in the planning process; and
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40 WHEREAS, the burdens host communities have shouldered
41 include high concentrations of particulate air emissions, loss
42 of open space, loss of other land uses, environmental concerns,



1 and projects that are maligned with the host community's
2 localized needs and priorities for provision of electrical
3 service; and

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5 WHEREAS, without intentional and informed planning,
6 progression toward the State's clean energy goals may therefore
7 come at the expense of already burdened communities; and

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9 WHEREAS, there are certain regulatory initiatives under the
10 Public Utilities Commission's purview that are underway,
11 including policies in Docket No. 2019-0323, which address rate
12 design for all customers and specifically provide for proposed
13 approaches to address consideration of relief for low- and
14 moderate-income customers; and

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16 WHEREAS, current circumstances necessitate an explicit
17 focus on energy and climate justice and energy equity in the
18 ongoing and future work of the Public Utilities Commission to
19 ensure that the benefits and burdens of energy infrastructure
20 development in the face of climate change are equitably
21 distributed and that relief options are available for low- and
22 moderate-income customers; now, therefore,

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24 BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Thirty-first
25 Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2022, the
26 House of Representatives concurring, that the Public Utilities
27 Commission, in consultation with the Division of Consumer
28 Advocacy, is requested to consider efforts to mitigate high
29 energy burdens for low- and moderate-income customers and
30 investigate how to integrate considerations of energy equity and
31 justice across its work; and

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33 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Public Utilities Commission
34 is requested to examine:

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36 (1) Low- and moderate-income rate discounts, bill credits,
37 and direct payments and whether these would be
38 appropriate in the State;
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40 (2) Expanded availability of utility bill assistance
41 programs and whether adequate payment plan
42 arrangements are available to low- and moderate-income



customers who are facing economic challenges, such as loss of employment;

(3) Measures to protect low- and moderate-income households, senior citizens, and households with infants from service disconnections, including reporting requirements for all utilities on the number of customers annually disconnected due to non-payment;

(4) The advantages and disadvantages of rate design, program offerings, and the requirements of community benefits agreements to address energy burden, energy insecurity, and environmental and energy justice concerns related to energy projects and programs; and

(5) Other customer-centric solutions to lessen the energy burden on low- and moderate-income customers and determine appropriate benefits above and beyond those accrued to the overall electric grid for communities that serve as geographic hosts to utility scale energy projects; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Public Utilities Commission is requested to establish the necessary proceeding or proceedings to conduct this examination; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Public Utilities Commission is requested to consult with the Division of Consumer Advocacy to obtain any necessary input in furtherance of this examination; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Public Utilities Commission is requested to submit a report to the Legislature of its findings and recommendations, including any proposed legislation, no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the Regular Session of 2023; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this Concurrent Resolution be transmitted to the Chairperson of the Public Utilities Commission and Executive Director of the Division of Consumer Advocacy.

