

MAR 11 2022

SENATE RESOLUTION

REQUESTING THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION, IN COLLABORATION WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS' DIVISION OF CONSUMER ADVOCACY, TO CONVENE A WORKING GROUP TO CREATE A HAWAII LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM TO ASSIST LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS WITH PAYING FOR THEIR HOME ENERGY.

1 WHEREAS, the Department of Business, Economic Development,
2 and Tourism states in its July 2021 report, "Electricity Burdens
3 on Hawaii Households", that household electricity burden, the
4 percentage of household income spent on electricity bills, is
5 one of the key elements contributing to a household's energy
6 insecurity, especially for low-income households; and

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8 WHEREAS, Hawaii's electricity rates are one of the highest
9 in the nation, at close to three times the national average, and
10 vary based on availability of renewable resources, power plants,
11 fuel costs, and pricing regulations; and

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13 WHEREAS, the 2020 report commissioned by the Aloha United
14 Way, "ALICE in Hawaii: A Financial Hardship Study", states that
15 forty-two percent of households in the State live below the
16 ALICE (asset limited, income constrained, employed) threshold,
17 meaning that almost half of all families in Hawaii are
18 struggling to make ends meet, even though they are employed; and

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20 WHEREAS, nine percent of these ALICE families are living in
21 poverty, and this trend has progressively worsened in recent
22 years due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic;
23 and

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25 WHEREAS, national survey results show that households below
26 the ALICE threshold fared significantly worse than households
27 above the ALICE threshold during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite
28 the added protective measures of eviction moratoria and food
29 assistance programs; and



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2 WHEREAS, the electric utility companies in the State
3 reported that for the month of December 2021, six thousand two
4 hundred twenty-five customers became eligible for service
5 disconnection due to nonpayment of bills; and
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7 WHEREAS, the electric utility companies also reported that
8 they entered into two thousand nine hundred seventy-four payment
9 plan agreements with customers to allow those customers to pay
10 off their unpaid bills over an extended period of time; and
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12 WHEREAS, in response to the devastating impacts of the
13 COVID-19 pandemic, the American Rescue Plan of 2021 authorized
14 the United States Department of the Treasury's Emergency Rental
15 Assistance Program to help households that are unable to pay
16 rent or utilities; and
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18 WHEREAS, in Hawaii, these federal funds are being
19 distributed by each county through the Rental and Utility
20 Assistance Programs and are scheduled to end by September 30,
21 2025; and
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23 WHEREAS, once the federal funding from the Emergency Rental
24 Assistance Program ends, it is anticipated that low-income
25 households will still require utility payment assistance to
26 prevent service terminations; and
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28 WHEREAS, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program
29 (LIHEAP) is a federally-funded, state-administered energy
30 program that has been in existence since 1981; and
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32 WHEREAS, the purpose of LIHEAP is to assist low-income
33 households, particularly those with the lowest incomes, that pay
34 a high proportion of household income for home energy; and
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36 WHEREAS, LIHEAP prevents low-income families from having to
37 choose between paying for their electric utility bills or
38 purchasing necessary medication and food; and
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40 WHEREAS, the federal Administration for Children and
41 Families' Office of Community Services notes that being
42 qualified for LIHEAP does not guarantee that a person in need



1 will receive help because LIHEAP assistance disbursements depend
2 on the amount of LIHEAP funds available for the year; once funds
3 run out for the year, further benefits cannot be distributed
4 until more funds are made available by Congress; and
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6 WHEREAS, according to Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity,
7 fewer than nine thousand Hawaii households, or about two
8 percent, participated in LIHEAP in 2020; now, therefore,
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10 BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Thirty-first
11 Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2022,
12 that the Public Utilities Commission, in collaboration with the
13 Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs' Division of
14 Consumer Advocacy, is requested to convene a working group to
15 create a Hawaii Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program to
16 assist low-income households with paying for their home energy;
17 and
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19 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the working group consist of
20 the following:
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- 22 (1) One representative from the Public Utilities
23 Commission;
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25 (2) One representative from the Department of Commerce and
26 Consumer Affairs' Division of Consumer Advocacy;
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- 28 (3) One representative from the Department of Human
29 Services;
- 30
31 (4) One representative from the Hawaii State Energy
32 Office;
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34 (5) One representative from each electric utility
35 operating in the State;
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37 (6) The Chairperson of the House of Representatives
38 Standing Committee on Energy and Environmental
39 Protection;
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41 (7) The Chairperson of the Senate Standing Committee on
42 Energy, Economic Development, and Tourism; and



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(8) One representative from Hawaii Energy; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the working group is requested to submit a report of its findings and recommendations, including any proposed legislation, to the Legislature and Governor 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 Resolution be transmitted to the Director of Human Services, Director of Commerce and Consumer Affairs, Consumer Advocate, Chairperson of the Public Utilities Commission, Chief Energy Officer of the Hawaii State Energy Office, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Hawaiian Electric Company, Chairperson of the Kaua'i Island Utility Cooperative Board of Directors, and Executive Director of Hawaii Energy.

OFFERED BY: *Rosely H. Bink*