
SENATE 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
29 exacerbating the situation of energy insecurity for residents;
30 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
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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 amount 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 have shouldered
38 include high concentrations of particulate air emissions, loss
39 of open space, loss of other land uses, environmental concerns,
40 and projects that are maligned with the host community's
41 localized needs and priorities for provision of electrical
42 service; and



1
 2 WHEREAS, without intentional and informed planning,
 3 progression toward the State's clean energy goals may therefore
 4 come at the expense of already burdened communities; and
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6 WHEREAS, there are certain regulatory initiatives under the
 7 Public Utilities Commission's purview that are underway,
 8 including policies in Docket No. 2019-0323, which address rate
 9 design for all customers and specifically provide for proposed
 10 approaches to address consideration of relief for low- and
 11 moderate-income customers; and
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13 WHEREAS, current circumstances necessitate an explicit
 14 focus on energy and climate justice and energy equity in the
 15 ongoing and future work of the Public Utilities Commission to
 16 ensure that the benefits and burdens of energy infrastructure
 17 development in the face of climate change are equitably
 18 distributed and that relief options are available for low- and
 19 moderate-income customers; now, therefore,
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21 BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Thirty-first
 22 Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2022,
 23 that the Public Utilities Commission, in consultation with the
 24 Division of Consumer Advocacy, is requested to consider efforts
 25 to mitigate high energy burdens for low- and moderate-income
 26 customers and investigate how to integrate considerations of
 27 energy equity and justice across its work; and
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29 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Public Utilities Commission
 30 is requested to examine:

- 31
- 32 (1) Low- and moderate-income rate discounts, bill credits,
 33 and direct payments and whether these would be
 34 appropriate in the State;
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 - 36 (2) Expanded availability of utility bill assistance
 37 programs and whether adequate payment plan
 38 arrangements are available to low- and moderate-income
 39 customers who are facing economic challenges, such as
 40 loss of employment;
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- 1 (3) Measures to protect low- and moderate-income
2 households, senior citizens, and households with
3 infants from service disconnections, including
4 reporting requirements for all utilities on the number
5 of customers annually disconnected due to non-payment;
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- 7 (4) The advantages and disadvantages of rate design,
8 program offerings, and the requirements of community
9 benefits agreements to address energy burden, energy
10 insecurity, and environmental and energy justice
11 concerns related to energy projects and programs; and
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- 13 (5) Other customer-centric solutions to lessen the energy
14 burden on low- and moderate-income customers and
15 determine appropriate benefits above and beyond those
16 accrued to the overall electric grid for communities
17 that serve as geographic hosts to utility scale energy
18 projects; and
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20 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Public Utilities Commission
21 is requested to establish the necessary proceeding or
22 proceedings to conduct this examination; and
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24 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Public Utilities Commission
25 is requested to consult with the Division of Consumer Advocacy
26 to obtain any necessary input in furtherance of this
27 examination; and
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29 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Public Utilities Commission
30 is requested to submit a report to the Legislature of its
31 findings and recommendations, including any proposed
32 legislation, no later than twenty days prior to the convening of
33 the Regular Session of 2023; and
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35 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this
36 Resolution be transmitted to the Chairperson of the Public
37 Utilities Commission and Executive Director of the Division of
38 Consumer Advocacy.

