



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII'
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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS
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JOSH GREEN, M.D.
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SYLVIA LUKE
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NADINE Y. ANDO
DIRECTOR | KA LUNA HO'OKELE

DEAN I HAZAMA
DEPUTY DIRECTOR | KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

Testimony of the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs

**Before the
House Committee on Consumer Protection & Commerce
Wednesday, March 19, 2025
2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 329**

**On the following measure:
S.B. 191, S.D. 1, H.D. 1, RELATING TO ENERGY ASSISTANCE**

Chair Matayoshi and Members of the Committee:

My name is Michael Angelo, and I am the Executive Director of the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs (Department) Division of Consumer Advocacy. The Department supports this bill.

The purpose of this bill is to: (1) establish the Hawai'i Home Energy Assistance Program within the Department of Human Services to assist eligible households in paying their energy bills; (2) require the Public Utilities Commission Public Benefits Fee Administrator to provide certain information and assistance to recipients of the program; and (3) establish positions and appropriate funds.

As recognized in this bill, Hawaii's electricity rates are amongst the highest in the nation and the number of electric utility customers in arrears and facing disconnections have grown since prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, given that the federal low-income home energy assistance program (LIHEAP) is based on a formula that is not tailored to the needs of Hawaii utility customers, so much so that in fiscal year 2021-2022

Hawaii received only 0.14% of federal LIHEAP funds, the Department fully supports the establishment of state home energy assistance program as envisioned in the S.D. 1 version of this bill.

The Department especially appreciates that this state program is envisioned to be funded by the general fund and other contributions, and not through fees assessed on utility customers. Other programs that seek funding through utility rates do not adequately consider that utility rates are regressive and will increase utility bills for all customers, especially low- to moderate-income households whose energy burden will only increase. Additional fees to pay for this program would further increase the energy bills that many customers have struggled to pay and exacerbate the very problem that this program is seeking to alleviate. As currently drafted, this measure avoids placing an additional financial burden on those households that this bill would assist. Furthermore, the Department fully supports the provisions of the bill that requires the Public Utilities Commission Public Benefits Fee Administrator, in conjunction with the Department of Human Services, to provide information and technical assistance to recipients of the state energy assistance program and assist them with implementing energy efficiency improvements.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



RYAN I. YAMANE
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA
Office of the Director
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TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

March 17, 2025

TO: The Honorable Representative Scot Z. Matayoshi, Chair
House Committee on Consumer Protection & Commerce

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **SB 191 SD1 HD1 – RELATING TO RELATING TO ENERGY ASSISTANCE.**

Hearing: Wednesday, March 19, 2025, 2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 329 & Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports this bill and provides comments. DHS respectfully requests that any appropriation not reduce or replace priorities identified in the executive budget.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this measure is to establish and appropriate funds for the Hawai'i Home Energy Assistance Program to assist eligible households in paying their energy bills. Requires the Public Utilities Commission Public Benefits Fee Administrator to provide certain information and assistance to recipients of the program. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

The Committee on Health and Human Services amended this measure (SD1) by:

- (1) Deleting its contents and inserting the language from S.B. No. 994, a substantively similar measure that:
 - (A) Establishes the Hawaii Home Energy Assistance Program within the Department of Human Services to assist qualifying households in paying their energy bills;
 - (B) Requires the Public Utilities Commission Public Benefits Fee Administrator to provide certain assistance to recipients of the program; and

- (C) Appropriates funds to be expended by the Department of Human Services;
- (2) Inserting an effective date of December 31, 2050, to encourage further discussion; and
- (3) Making a technical, nonsubstantive amendment for the purposes of clarity and consistency.

The Committees on Energy & Environmental Protection and Human Services & Homelessness further amended this measure (HD1) by:

- (1) Changing the appropriation to an unspecified amount;
- (2) Changing the number of positions established to unspecified numbers;
- (3) Changing the effective date to July 1, 3000, to encourage further discussion; and
- (4) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity, consistency, and style.

DHS currently contracts agencies in each county for the intake and eligibility determination of applications for the Hawai'i Home Energy Assistance Program (H-HEAP), federally referred to as the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). The total for the four contracts is just over \$500,000.

With the rising costs of utilities, Hawai'i households are often forced to prioritize their expenses, often forgoing utilities in favor of rent or food. For over 40 years, H-HEAP has assisted vulnerable Hawai'i households with electric and gas utility assistance payments through energy crisis intervention or energy credits. These funds prevent or restore disconnection of service or provide credit to help offset the household's energy burden.

Each year, funding is subject to Congressional appropriation with decreasing allotments in the years leading up to FFY 2020. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Congressional action and supplemental funding from various federal Acts allowed DHS to increase income limits to serve more households with record high energy credits, increase energy credit payments, provide a supplemental crisis payment in 2021, and implement complete erasure of utility arrears in FFY 2022 and 2023 for eligible households.

In FFY 2023, DHS received the largest LIHEAP appropriation in program history. In total, \$10.6 million passed through to nearly 8,300 Hawai'i households in the form of direct payments to utility companies.

In FFY 2024, the appropriation was \$8.5 million, lower than the past few recent years but higher than pre-pandemic funding, serving 8,809 households. Of these households, 6,873 contained a vulnerable family member: a disabled adult, an adult over 60 years old, or a child under the age of 5; and benefits were lower than FFY 2023.

For the FFY 2025, the current appropriation is \$7.9 million. Without further funding, eligible households will have a lower benefit than in the past four years despite facing up to a 30% increase in utility costs. The establishment and funding of this program would provide a needed, vital, and stable program for H-HEAP to serve better households and our most vulnerable families that are facing rising energy costs.

Lastly, DHS recommends that if the intent for this program is to be an ongoing service, then funding should be appropriated to the Department's base budget in the budget bill HB300 as general funds. However, we respectfully request that any appropriation not reduce or replace budget priorities identified in the executive budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR



STATE OF HAWAII
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
465 S. KING STREET, #103
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Testimony of the Public Utilities Commission

To the
House Committee on
Consumer Protection & Commerce

March 19, 2025
2:00 p.m.

Chair Matayoshi, Vice Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

Measure: S.B. No. 191, S.D. 1, H.D. 1
Title: RELATING TO ENERGY ASSISTANCE.

Position:

The Public Utilities Commission ("Commission") strongly supports this measure and offers the following comments for your consideration.

Comments:

The Commission deeply appreciates the intent of this measure to assist households in paying their energy bills by creating a Hawaii home energy assistance program. This aligns with our core mission of ensuring safe, reliable, and affordable utility services for Hawaii residents. Importantly, this measure addresses a critical and growing energy affordability crisis in Hawaii.

The Commission opened Docket No. 2022-0250 on "Energy Equity and Justice" to examine achieving equity in both social and economic participation in the energy system. Amid this broader equity investigation, the Commission identified a need to explore the equity implications of utility disconnections due to nonpayment, which disproportionately affect low-income households. Similarly, in response to 2022 legislative resolutions S.C.R. 242, S.D. 1, S.R. 133, S.D. 1, and H.R. 43, H.D. 1, the Commission and the Consumer Advocate established a Working Group in September 2022 focused on creating a Hawaii home energy assistance program.¹ This group has met regularly since then, most recently on February 18, 2025.

Hawaii households face significant energy burden. Just last year, over 20 percent of households in Hawaii reported foregoing critical expenses such as food or medicine to

¹ State of Hawaii Public Utilities Commission, "Report to the 2023 Legislature" (Dec 2022).

pay their energy bill in full.² Hawaii ranked 5th in the nation for highest average household electricity burden, and on top of that – households living below the Federal Poverty Level spent approximately 20 percent of their income on electricity costs, over nine times higher than the State average.³ Relatedly, disconnections rates have more than doubled from approximately 5,900 in 2018 to roughly 12,800 in 2023.⁴

The current federal program for Low Income Home Energy Assistance (“LIHEAP”) remains woefully inadequate for Hawaii’s needs. Despite having the nation’s highest household electricity costs (about 63 percent more than the national average),⁵ Hawaii receives the lowest LIHEAP funding nationwide.⁶ The program’s 1984 funding formula heavily favors states with high heating needs while ignoring electricity price differences and Hawaii’s unique challenges. The National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition reports that Hawaii received just 0.14 percent of federal LIHEAP funds in fiscal year 2021-2022 – about half of the next-lowest state.⁷ Furthermore, only about 6 percent of federally income-eligible Hawaii households have received LIHEAP heating assistance over the past four years.⁸

The establishment of a Hawaii home energy assistance program is not just important - it is urgent. As more families face disconnection, the gap between federal assistance and actual need continues to widen. Without state-level intervention, more Hawaii families will face impossible choices between paying for electricity and other basic necessities.

Given these challenges and federal funding inadequacies, the Commission strongly supports establishing a Hawaii home energy assistance program as written in S.B. 191, S.D. 1, H.D. 1. The measure will provide immediate relief to struggling Hawaii families, create a more equitable energy assistance framework, and reduce utility disconnections and their associated societal costs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important measure.

² RMI, “Pathways to Disconnection Reform in Hawaii” (Aug 2024).

³ Hawaii Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism (DBEDT), “Electricity Burdens on Hawaii Households: 2022 Update” (Jan 2025).

⁴ RMI, “Pathways to Disconnection Reform in Hawaii” (Aug 2024).

⁵ DBEDT, “Electricity Burdens on Hawaii Households: 2022 Update” (Jan 2025).

⁶ LIHEAP Clearing House, “FY24 releases and reallocation awards to states and territories.”

⁷ National Energy & Utility Affordability Coalition, “State Utility Assistance Program Options Prepared for Hawaii Working Group” (Nov 2022).

⁸ LIHEAP Clearing House, “Percent of Federally Income-Eligible Households Receiving LIHEAP Heating Assistance.”

OFFICE OF CLIMATE CHANGE SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCY
KE KE'ENA LOLI ANIAU MĀLAMA 'ĀINA A ME KE OLA LOA
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RICK BLANGIARDI
MAYOR
MEIA



BENJAMIN SULLIVAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR &
CHIEF RESILIENCE OFFICER
PO'O HO'OKO & KAHU OLA LOA

KEALOHA FOX
DEPUTY DIRECTOR &
CHIEF RESILIENCE OFFICER
HOPE PO'O & HOPE KAHU OLA LOA

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19, 2025, 2:00 P.M.

STATE OF HAWAII
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER PROTECTION & COMMERCE

**TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 191, SD1, HD1
RELATING TO ENERGY ASSISTANCE**

BY,

BENJAMIN SULLIVAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CHIEF RESILIENCE OFFICER
OFFICE OF CLIMATE CHANGE, SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCY

Dear Chair Matayoshi, Vice Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

The City and County of Honolulu (“City”) Office of Climate Change, Sustainability and Resiliency (“Resilience Office”) **supports** SB191, SD1, HD1, which establishes the Hawai’i Home Energy Assistance Program to assist qualifying households in paying their energy bills.

The state’s allocation of federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding fails to recognize Hawai’i’s unique challenges, where electricity prices are among the highest in the nation. Without additional assistance, many of O’ahu’s households are forced to make difficult trade-offs between essential needs like food, healthcare, and energy.

Furthermore, addressing energy affordability is critical to both mitigating and adapting to climate change. Ensuring that households can afford electricity enables greater participation in clean energy programs, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and supporting O’ahu’s 100% renewable energy and clean economy targets. At the same time, energy security enhances community resilience to climate-related disasters, extreme heat, and other disruptions. SB191, SD1, HD1 will provide much-needed relief to residents while advancing our shared commitment to a just and equitable clean energy transition.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB191, SD1, HD1.



**Hawaiian
Electric**

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
CONSUMER PROTECTION & COMMERCE**

**SB 191 SD1, HD1
Relating to Energy Assistance**

March 19, 2025
2:00 pm
State Capitol, Conference Room 329

Noelle Kakimoto
Equity, Access & Affordability Manager
Hawaiian Electric

Dear Chair Matayoshi, Vice Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Noelle Kakimoto and I am testifying on behalf of Hawaiian Electric in strong support of SB 191 SD1, HD1, Relating to Energy Assistance.

The purpose of this bill is to establish the Hawaii Home Energy Assistance Program (“HIHEAP”) within the Department of Human Services to extend funding for qualifying households in need of financial assistance for utility bills. The Hawaii Home Energy Assistance Program would complement the current Federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, known as LIHEAP in providing critical fiscal aid for low- to moderate-income families. As Aloha United Way’s 2024 ALICE Report highlights 33% of Hawai’i households living below the ALICE threshold, Hawai’i communities across all islands would benefit from ancillary resources to potentially ease or decrease their energy burden, or the percentage of household income going toward energy costs.

Hawaiian Electric strongly supports this bill as it would establish and appropriate funds to our most vulnerable community members in the form of financial assistance and energy efficient efforts. The benefits of such a program extend far beyond

immediate financial relief. By providing assistance, we can significantly improve the quality of life for low-income families, enabling them to allocate their limited resources toward other essential needs such as food, healthcare, and education. Moreover, this program will contribute to the overall economic stability of our communities. When residents can manage their energy costs effectively, it reduces the likelihood of arrears and debt accumulation, fostering a more resilient and financially healthy community.

The bill notes that the Public Utilities Commission Public Benefits Fee administrator may offer information and assistance to encourage more energy efficient homes, which would also positively impact energy usage and costs. Hawaiian Electric supports funding for HIHEAP chartered by general revenues of the State of Hawai'i instead of seeking additional fees or moneys from ratepayers—further increasing customers' financial burdens. Hawaiian Electric also supports expanding Department of Human Services positions and system modifications to implement the new program diligently and efficiently.

Accordingly, Hawaiian Electric strongly supports SB 191 SD1, HD1. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.



HAWAII WORKERS CENTER

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Hawaii'i

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March 17, 2025

**Executive Board
Committee**

Rev. Sam Domingo
Board Chair

Mary Ochs
Vice Chair

Dr. Arcelita Imasa
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CJ Johnson

Executive Director

Sergio Alcubilla III, Esq.

Hawaii State Legislature
Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection
Rep. Scot Z. Matayoshi, Chair
Rep. Cory M. Chun, Vice Chair

RE: STRONG SUPPORT for SB191 SD1 RELATING TO ENERGY ASSISTANCE.

Dear Chair Matayoshi, Vice Chair Chun, and members of the Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection:

The Hawai'i Workers Center (HWC) envisions a Hawaii in which all workers are empowered to exercise their right to organize for their social, economic and political well-being. It is a resource of information, education, training and organizing for Hawaii's workers.

The HWC stands in strong support of SB 191 SD1 HD1 which establishes the Hawaii Home Energy Assistance Program within the Department of Human Services to assist qualifying households in paying their energy bills. Requires the Public Utilities Commission Public Benefits Fee Administrator to provide certain assistance to recipients of the program.

Hawaii's high cost of living leaves many residents, especially our lower wage workers vulnerable as we live paycheck to paycheck. In most instances, we are only one accident or medical bill away from being unable to pay rent, utilities, and meeting our most basic needs. One member of our workers' association, a single parent with 5 minor children, was living in her public housing unit with no electricity for over one year. Owing a bill of nearly \$250, she resorted to using lanterns, coolers, and camping stoves in order to prioritize putting food on the table to feed her family.

With many social services organizations depleted of funds to help with utility bills, our organization was able to help with a one-time payment to get her electricity turned back on. She went home, called us on the phone and cried when she turned her light switch on and the lights turned on. No resident or children should ever have to experience this type of trauma, especially in Hawaii, where it holds a special distinction of being one of the first in the world to have electricity installed in its royal palace.

We ask that you please support and schedule SB 191 SB1 HD1 for a hearing in your respective committees.

Sincerely,

Sergio Alcubilla
Executive Director



CATHOLIC CHARITIES HAWAII

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 191 HD1: RELATING TO ENERGY ASSISTANCE

TO: House Committee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
FROM: Tina Andrade, President and CEO, Catholic Charities Hawai'i
Hearing: **Wednesday, 3/19/25; 2:00 pm; CR 329 & Videoconference**

Chair Matayoshi, Chair Chun, and Members, Committee on Consumer Protection & Commerce:

Catholic Charities Hawai'i **supports SB 191 HD1**, which establishes the Hawai'i Home Energy Assistance program within the Department of Human Services (DHS) to help low-income households to pay their energy bills.

Catholic Charities Hawai'i (CCH), a community-based organization, has provided social services in Hawai'i for over 77 years, assisting 40,000 people annually. Our services target the most vulnerable in Hawai'i, including elders, veterans, children, families, houseless individuals, and immigrants. We participate in the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) initiative and other initiatives to assist our local residents as they face our high cost of living.

Hawai'i residents face incredibly high energy bills. The 11% of our state's households below the Federal Poverty Line spend approximately 20% of their income on electricity—over nine times the state average. Our ALICE population of working families also face significant economic challenges. 35% report increased difficulty paying household expenses.

This financial strain has led to a huge surge in utility disconnections. By 2023, these had shot up to 12,000 disconnects/year. This is DOUBLE the average pre-COVID. Besides the large increase in the cost of living burdening our residents, there are fewer resources to assist those in need with help. The very successful Rental & Utility Relief program (RURP) in Honolulu County has assisted with about \$225 Million, but is now closed for new applicants.

Catholic Charities Hawai'i urges your support for the **Hawai'i Home Energy Program (HIHEAP) to help residents manage their high electricity costs**. HIHEAP would provide much-needed relief, preventing families from having to choose between keeping the lights on and meeting other essential needs. Immediate action is necessary to protect our most vulnerable communities from further financial distress.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We appreciate your leadership in addressing Hawai'i's energy affordability crisis.

If you have any questions, please contact our Legislative Liaison, Betty Lou Larson, at (808) 527-4813.





HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER PROTECTION AND COMMERCE

MARCH 19, 2025

SB 191, SD1, HD1, RELATING TO ENERGY ASSISTANCE

POSITION: SUPPORT

Coalition Earth **supports** SB 191, SD1, HD1, relating to energy assistance, which establishes the Hawai'i Home Energy Assistance Program within the Department of Human Services to assist eligible households in paying their energy bills; requires the Public Utilities Commission Public Benefits Fee Administrator to provide certain information and assistance to recipients of the program; establishes positions; and appropriates funds.

We must do more to offset the energy costs incurred by working families. Currently one out of every four households in Hawai'i reports that they are "doubling up" or are three paychecks or less away from being homeless, per the Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice. Additionally, over 60 percent of households are severely cost-burdened, meaning that they pay more than 30 percent of their income on housing, a number that rises to over 80 percent of extremely low-income households.

Moreover, a recent survey conducted by the Holomua Collective found that 60 percent of residents face worries about not being able to pay a monthly bill; 63 percent face difficulties in saving money from their paychecks for future emergencies, retirement, or other expenses; and **82 percent say that the state needs to do more to increase access to energy savings for homeowners and renters.** A staggering 70 percent of middle-class respondents to Holomua's survey say they will—or are unsure if they will have to—relocate in the coming years. As Holomua Collective states in its report on the findings, "These are the very workers powering Hawai'i's economy, now on the brink of leaving their homes behind."

In 2022, the legislature adopted SCR 242, 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 low-income home energy assistance program

to assist low-income households with paying for their energy costs. In response, the PUC's working group found that over 20 percent of households in our state report foregoing critical expenses, such as food or medicine, to pay their energy bills and that Hawai'i ranked 5th in the nation for highest average household electricity burden. In its *"Electricity Burdens on Hawai'i Households: 2022 Update*, DBEDT analysts noted that **households living below the federal poverty level spend approximately 20 percent of their income on electricity costs, over nine times higher than the state average. The report also highlights our state's exorbitant electricity costs: 63 percent more than the national average.**

According to the LIHEAP Clearing House, a mere 6 percent of federally income-eligible households in Hawai'i have received LIHEAP heating assistance over the past four years. As the price of electricity continues to rise—along with all other expenses, like food and housing—we must take action to prevent energy costs from exacerbating electricity disconnections and out-migration. Access to energy is essential to uplifting economic resilience and public health for our community. Developing equity-based policy interventions is a matter of utter importance for residents who are living on the cusp of financial precarity, barely able to make ends meet.

*Coalition Earth is a nongovernmental organization that works to preserve the well-being of people and our planet. We champion policies that advance climate resilience, clean energy, public health, and economic fairness for working families. **Contact us at info@coalitionearth.org.***



House Committee on Consumer Protection & Commerce

Testimony on SB 191

Relating to Energy Assistance

March 19th, 2025

2:00 PM

Room 329

The Climate Change and Health Working Group (CCHWG) is a cross-sector collaborative interested in strengthening climate and health resiliency in Hawai'i. CCHWG supports this measure, which establishes the Hawai'i Home Energy Assistance Program to alleviate the high cost of electricity for vulnerable residents in Hawai'i.

Testimony of the Hawai'i Climate Change and Health Working Group

In Support of SB 191

Relating to Energy Assistance

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

The Climate Change and Health Working Group (CCHWG) *strongly supports* SB191, which seeks to establish the Hawai'i Home Energy Assistance Program within the Department of Human Services and requires the Public Utilities Commission's Public Benefits Fee Administrator to provide crucial support for program recipients. We believe this bill will help alleviate the high cost of electricity for vulnerable households, enhance access to cooling—especially critical as the climate continues to warm—and contribute to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions by promoting energy efficiency.

Hawai'i's electricity rates are nearly three times the national average, placing disproportionate economic burdens on lower-income families who are already struggling to afford basic necessities. According to the "ALICE in Hawai'i: 2022 Facts and Figures" report, nearly half of our households live at or below the ALICE threshold. Those households must often make

impossible choices between paying utility bills and paying for other essentials such as healthcare, nutritious food, and housing. By creating a state-administered energy assistance program, this bill will extend relief to more local families—many of whom do not qualify for or cannot access the underfunded federal LIHEAP program.

Increasing the affordability of electricity helps ensure that households can safely cool their homes, reducing the risk of heat-related illnesses. This measure is vital from a public health standpoint, as extreme heat can significantly endanger our elderly populations, children, and those with pre-existing health conditions. By making cooling more accessible, SB191 strengthens climate resilience and prioritizes community well-being.

Furthermore, SB191's emphasis on energy efficiency benefits both households and the environment. When the Public Benefits Fee Administrator helps recipients implement energy-efficient upgrades, it lowers monthly electricity bills, reduces overall energy demand, and cuts greenhouse gas emissions. In turn, this mitigates climate change impacts, which directly affect our residents' health and quality of life. Reduced emissions not only improve air quality but also alleviate climate stressors that disproportionately harm at-risk communities.

Beyond immediate cost savings, this legislation promotes long-term equity by addressing broader social determinants of health. When families are less burdened by high utility bills, they can redirect those resources to healthcare, education, and other critical needs. In this way, SB191 supports healthier, more economically stable families and fosters a more resilient Hawai'i.

For these reasons, the Climate Change and Health Working Group strongly urges the Committees to pass SB191. By making electricity more affordable and boosting energy efficiency, this bill safeguards the health of our most vulnerable populations, addresses climate-related risks, and bolsters our collective resilience.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support of this measure. The climate crisis is a health crisis.

Sincerely,

The Climate Change & Health Working Group



Before the House Committee on Consumer Protection & Commerce

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 at 2:00 p.m.

Testimony in Support of SB 191 SD1 HD1: Relating to Energy Assistance

Chair Matayoshi, Vice Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support and provide comments on Senate Bill 191 SD1 HD1.

Hawai'i Energy works to empower island families and businesses on behalf of the Hawai'i Public Utilities Commission (PUC) to make smart energy choices to reduce energy consumption, save money, and pursue a 100% clean energy future. Energy efficiency – the energy we do not use – is the cheapest option to help us achieve our 100% clean energy goal by eliminating waste and being more efficient.

This bill would establish the state-level Hawai'i Home Energy Assistance Program (HIHEAP) to supplement the support our residents currently receive from the federal-level Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). LIHEAP, which provides assistance to families nationwide via a one-time payment to help with energy costs, unfortunately has limited reach in Hawai'i. According to the Hawai'i State LIHEAP Working Group, created by the adoption of Senate Concurrent Resolution 242 in 2022 and convened by the PUC, as of 2023 only 11 percent of Hawai'i's eligible population receives LIHEAP funds.

Funding for states from LIHEAP is determined by a formula that is heavily weighted for states with large heating needs and does not account for specific electricity prices, and consequently Hawai'i consistently receives the least funding amongst the 50 states by a large margin. According to the Department of Health & Human Services, which administers LIHEAP, Hawai'i received about \$8.3 million in LIHEAP funds in FY24, the lowest of any state allocation. In total, LIHEAP awarded more than \$4 billion to states, tribes & territories in FY24.

Given that Hawai'i has the highest electricity rates in the country, yet receives the least amount of support for its residents from LIHEAP, the need for a state-level program to supplement energy assistance for Hawai'i families is clear. Hawai'i Energy applauds the legislature's efforts to support our residents in need of energy assistance.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 191 SD1 HD1.

Sincerely,
Caroline Carl
Executive Director
Hawai'i Energy

TAX FOUNDATION OF HAWAII

735 Bishop Street, Suite 417

Honolulu, Hawaii 96813 Tel. 536-4587

SUBJECT: MISCELLANEOUS, Hawaii Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program

BILL NUMBER: SB 191 SD 1 HD 1

INTRODUCED BY: House Committees on Energy & Environmental Protection and Human Services & Homelessness

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Establishes the Hawai'i Home Energy Assistance Program within the Department of Human Services to assist qualifying households in paying their energy bills. Requires the Public Utilities Commission Public Benefits Fee Administrator to provide certain assistance to recipients of the program. Establishes positions. Appropriates funds.

SYNOPSIS: Adds a new section to chapter 346, HRS, to establish a Hawaii home energy assistance program. The program is to assist eligible low-income households with their energy costs. Any person who is in need of this assistance may apply, including documentation to prove that the applicant (1) Is a resident of the State; (2) Has an active utilities account in the State; and (3) Satisfies the income eligibility limit and all other eligibility standards established by DHS.

Amends section 269-123, HRS, to task the public benefits fee administrator with providing information and technical assistance about available energy efficiency programs to recipients of the Hawaii home energy assistance program, including an energy audit if requested by the recipient, and assisting the recipients with implementation of energy efficiency improvements.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 31, 3000.

STAFF COMMENTS: We assume, because there is no provision to the contrary, that the program will be funded by general appropriations.

We have some concerns about the eligibility requirements for this program, because the bill as currently written appears to give the Department of Human Services unlimited discretion to set “the income eligibility limit and all other eligibility standards,” per subsection (b)(3) of the new section added to chapter 346. These are not purely technical choices, so policymakers should set some policy guardrails.

Digested: 3/17/2025

SB-191-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2025 12:15:22 PM

Testimony for CPC on 3/19/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Master Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire	Ohana Unity Party & Kingdom of The Hawaiian islands	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Dear Honorable Members of the Hawaii Legislature:

I'm writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill No. 191, which establishes the Hawaii Home Energy Assistance Program (H-HEAP). Below are key reasons why this bill is critical for our state:

- **Hawaii's High Electricity Costs:**
 - Rates are nearly 3x the national average—37 cents per kWh vs. 13 cents (U.S. Energy Information Administration).
 - For an average household using 18.5 kWh daily, this means a monthly bill of ~\$205—a heavy burden for many.
- **Struggling Families:**
 - 44% of Hawaii households live below the ALICE threshold (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), per the 2022 "ALICE in Hawaii" report by Aloha United Way.
 - These are working families—almost half the state—struggling to afford basics like electricity.
- **Rising Utility Debt:**
 - Thousands of customers are in arrears, owing millions collectively, with disconnection rates higher than pre-COVID levels.
 - Climate change compounds this—rising temperatures could increase cooling needs by 20% in coming decades (Hawaii State Energy Office).
- **Federal LIHEAP Falls Short:**
 - In 2020, it served <9,000 households—just 2% of those potentially eligible based on income.
 - Hawaii received only 0.14% of federal LIHEAP funds in FY 2021-2022, the lowest of any state (National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition)—half the next-lowest state's share.
 - The 1984 funding formula ignores Hawaii's unique electricity cost challenges.
- **S.B. No. 191's Solution:**
 - Establishes H-HEAP to help eligible households pay energy bills, supplementing federal aid.
 - Appropriates \$5M annually for FY 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 to fund staff, system upgrades, and services.

- Requires the Public Utilities Commission’s Public Benefits Fee Administrator to provide energy audits and efficiency assistance—reducing long-term costs.
- Broader Impact:
 - Supports the 44% of ALICE households, reducing disconnection risks and economic strain.
 - Aligns with Hawaii’s energy goals—small-scale solar already generates 19% of electricity (EIA, 2023)—showing efficiency measures work with proper support.
- Call to Action:
 - Passing S.B. No. 191 ensures no family chooses between lights and food.
 - It’s an investment in equity, sustainability, and Hawaii’s future.

I urge your support for this vital legislation. Please let me know if I can provide more data or discuss further.

Sincerely,

Master Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire, HRM

Ohana Unity Party, Chairman

www.Ohanaunityparty.com

Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands, H.I.

SB-191-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2025 2:21:07 PM

Testimony for CPC on 3/19/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
TERI SAVAIINAEA	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB191
RELATING TO ENERGY ASSISTANCE

March 15, 2025

TO: Chair Matayoshi, Vice Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee on Energy, Economic Development, and Tourism

FROM: Teri Kia Savaiinaea, Wai'anae resident

RE: Strong Support for SB191 SD1 HD1: Relating to Energy Assistance

Aloha Chair Chun, Vice Chair Matayoshi, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Teri Kia Savaiinaea, and I am a resident of Wai'anae, a mother, educator, and community advocate. I am writing in strong support of SB191, which seeks to expand energy assistance programs to provide vital relief to low-income families and underserved communities across Hawai'i.

As someone who has lived and worked in Wai'anae for over 26 years, I have witnessed firsthand the struggles our families face when utility costs become overwhelming. Rising energy bills place a heavy burden on our working-class families, kupuna on fixed incomes, and those who are most vulnerable in our community. Many families on the Leeward Coast are already balancing the costs of rent, food, and other basic needs, and this bill would provide much-needed support to help keep their lights on and homes comfortable.

SB191 SD1 HD1 is crucial because it strengthens the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and other assistance initiatives by expanding eligibility, increasing funding, and improving outreach efforts. By doing so, we can ensure that our most vulnerable residents are aware of and have access to these critical resources.

In addition, providing energy assistance supports our broader goals of promoting equity, improving public health outcomes, and ensuring economic stability for families throughout our islands. Investing in energy relief programs will not only improve the quality of life for residents in my district but will also empower families statewide.

I respectfully urge the Committee to pass SB191 SD1 HD1 to help lift the burden off our hard-working families and ensure every household can afford their essential energy needs.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Teri Kia Savaiinaea, Wai'anae resident

SB-191-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2025 4:41:07 PM

Testimony for CPC on 3/19/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carmela Resuma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure.

In Support of S.B. 191, SD1, HD1

RELATING TO ENERGY ASSISTANCE.

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Keola Larson, and I support S.B. 191's goal of creating a Hawaii Home Energy Assistance Program to assist Hawaii families in paying their utility bills.

Hawaii families face incredibly high energy burdens, particularly those who are already struggling. Just last year, [over 20% of households in Hawaii](#) reported foregoing critical expenses such as food or medicine to pay their energy bill in full last year. Hawaii ranked 5th in the nation for highest average household electricity burden [according to a recent report from DBEDT](#), and on top of that – households living below the Federal Poverty Level spent ~20% of their income on electricity costs, over 9x higher than the average Hawaii household.

Despite these challenges, the current federal funding for home energy assistance (Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program) remains inadequate for our needs in Hawaii. In 2024, Hawaii received the [lowest amount of federal LIHEAP funding amongst the United States](#). Hawaii received just 0.14% of federal LIHEAP funds in fiscal year 2021-2022 – [about half of the next-lowest state](#).

Accordingly, the creation of a Hawaii Home Energy Assistance Program ("HIHEAP") through S.B. 191 represents a critical intervention. With federal aid falling far short and disconnection rates climbing, immediate state action is essential. Power disconnections exact a heavy toll and create ripple effects throughout communities - endangering vulnerable residents' health, hampering students' ability to learn, and trapping families in cycles of financial hardship through reconnection penalties. State support through HIHEAP would help prevent Hawaii families from having to choose between power and other basic necessities.

As such, I strongly support the creation of a Hawaii Home Energy Assistance Program through S.B. 191.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

Sincerely,
Keola Larson

LATE

SB-191-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/18/2025 4:26:53 PM

Testimony for CPC on 3/19/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stephanie Chang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Stephanie Chang, and I am in support of SB191.

I've been a member of the Energy Equity Hui since 2020. It is a statewide public-private collaborative network to explore equitable outcomes and in support of communities as our system undergoes deep transformation toward a resilient, clean energy and decarbonized economy.

As we work to center community needs and make systems change to see communities as co-creators of our energy system, the **Hawai'i Home Energy Assistance Program ("HIHEAP") through SB 191 represents a critical intervention.** Energy burden is particularly high for our Hawai'i families, and this measure would provide much needed relief until we can truly reduce the costs of energy from more renewables online.

With federal aid falling far short and disconnection rates climbing, immediate state action is essential. State support through HIHEAP would help prevent Hawai'i families from having to choose between power and other basic necessities.

Mahalo fo ryour support of this bill.

Me ke aloha,
Stephanie Chang