

**JOSH GREEN, M.D.**  
GOVERNOR | KE KIA'ĀINA

**SYLVIA LUKE**  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA

**STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I**  
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**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS**  
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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 Energy & Environmental Protection**  
**And**  
**House Committee on Human Services & Homelessness**  
**Thursday, March 13, 2025**  
**11:15 a.m.**  
**Conference Room 325**

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

Chair Lowen, Chair Marten, and Members of the Committees:

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 qualifying households in paying their energy bills; (2) require the Public Utilities Commission Public Benefits Fee Administrator to provide certain assistance to recipients of the program; and (3) establish positions and appropriate funds.

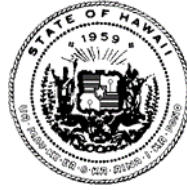
As recognized in this bill, Hawaii's electricity rates are amongst the highest in the nation and the number of electric utility customers in arrears and facing disconnections have grown since prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, given that the federal low-income home energy assistance program (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 LAWE LAWE KANAKA  
Office of the Director  
P. O. Box 339  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

March 12, 2025

TO: The Honorable Representative Nicole E. Lowen, Chair  
House Committee on Energy and Environmental Protection

The Honorable Representative Lisa Marten, Chair  
House Committee on Human Services and Homelessness

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

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

Hearing: Thursday, March 13, 2025, 11:15 a.m.  
Conference Room 325 & 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 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. Establishes positions. Appropriates funds. Effective 12/31/2050. (SD1)

The Committee on Health and Human Services amended this measure 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.

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 or as a general fund appropriation rather than to a special fund account to allow for a more stable and sustained funding source. 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  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

LEODOLOFF R. ASUNCION, JR.  
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## Testimony of the Public Utilities Commission

To the  
House Committees on  
Energy & Environmental Protection  
and  
Human Services & Homelessness

March 13, 2025  
11:15 a.m.

Chairs Lowen and Marten, Vice Chairs Perruso and Olds, and Members of the Committees:

**Measure:** S.B. No. 191, S.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.<sup>1</sup> This group has met regularly since then, most recently on February 18, 2025.

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

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 pay their energy bill in full.<sup>2</sup> Hawaii ranked 5<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> Relatedly, disconnections rates have more than doubled from approximately 5,900 in 2018 to roughly 12,800 in 2023.<sup>4</sup>

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),<sup>5</sup> Hawaii receives the lowest LIHEAP funding nationwide.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, only about 6 percent of federally income-eligible Hawaii households have received LIHEAP heating assistance over the past four years.<sup>8</sup>

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. 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



**Hawaiian  
Electric**

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEES ON ENERGY &  
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND HUMAN SERVICES & HOMELESSNESS**

**SB 191 SD1  
Relating to Energy Assistance**

March 13, 2025  
11:15 am  
State Capitol, Conference Room 325

Noelle Kakimoto  
Equity, Access & Affordability Manager  
Hawaiian Electric

Dear Chairs Lowen and Marten, Vice Chairs Perruso and Olds, and Members of the Committees,

My name is Noelle Kakimoto and I am testifying on behalf of Hawaiian Electric in strong support of SB 191, SD1, 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. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.



## CATHOLIC CHARITIES HAWAII

### TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 191 SD1: RELATING TO ENERGY ASSISTANCE

TO: House Committees on Energy & Environmental Protection and Human Services and Homelessness  
FROM: Tina Andrade, President and CEO, Catholic Charities Hawai'i  
Hearing: **Thursday, 3/13/25; 11:15 AM; CR 325 & Videoconference**

Chair Lowen, Chair Marten, and Members, Committees on Energy & Environmental Protection and Human Services and Homelessness:

Catholic Charities Hawai'i **supports HB 191 SD1**, 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) is a tax exempt, community-based organization that has been providing social services in Hawai'i for over 77 years. CCH has programs serving elders, veterans, children, families, homeless and immigrants. Our mission is to provide services and advocacy to the most vulnerable of the people in Hawai'i. 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 has 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.



CLARENCE T. C. CHING CAMPUS • 1822 Ke'eumoku Street, Honolulu, HI 96822  
Phone (808) 527-4813 •





**SB-191-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/12/2025 8:31:19 AM

Testimony for EEP on 3/13/2025 11:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Henry Curtis	Life of the Land	Support	In Person

Comments:

Please pass this very important bill



Before the House Committees on Energy & Environmental Protection, and Human Services & Homelessness

Thursday, March 13, 2025 at 11:15 a.m.

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

Chairs Lowen and Marten, Vice Chairs Perruso and Olds, and Members of the Committees:

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

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.

Sincerely,  
Caroline Carl  
Executive Director  
Hawai'i Energy



# HAWAII WORKERS CENTER

Defending and Respecting the workers of  
Hawaii'i

808-743-1031 ☎

[hawaiiworkerscenter@gmail.com](mailto:hawaiiworkerscenter@gmail.com) ✉

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[hawaiiworkerscenter.org](http://hawaiiworkerscenter.org) 🌐

March 12, 2025

Hawaii State House of Representatives  
House Committee on Energy & Environmental Protection  
Chair Rep. Nicole Lowen

**Executive Board  
Committee**

House Committee on Human Services & Homelessness  
Chair Rep. Lisa Marten

Rev. Sam Domingo  
*Board Chair*

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

Mary Ochs  
*Vice Chair*

Dear Chairs Rep. Lowen and Rep. Marten:

Dr. Arcelita Imasa  
*Secretary*

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.

Kami Yamamoto  
*Treasurer*

It is a resource of information, education, training and organizing for Hawaii's workers.

**Board Members**

The HWC stands in strong support of SB 191 SD1 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.

Yoko Liriano

Nanea Lo

Innocenta  
Sound-Kikku

Ray Catania

Justin Jansen

Leyton Torda

Kami Yamamoto

CJ Johnson

Hawaii's high cost of living leaves many residents, especially our lower wage workers vulnerable as we live paycheck to paycheck. In 2024, over 20% of households in Hawaii reported foregoing critical expenses such as food or medicine to pay their energy bill in full last year. 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.

**Advisory Committee**

John Witeck

Dr. Amefil "Amy"  
Agbayani

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 child 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.

**Executive Director**

Sergio Alcubilla III, Esq.

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.

We ask that you please support SB 191 S.D. 1 in your respective committees.

Respectfully,

Sergio Alcubilla  
*Executive Director*

**SB-191-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 6:01:13 PM

Testimony for EEP on 3/13/2025 11:15:00 AM

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

Comments:

Aloha Members of the Hawaii State Legislature,

I strongly support Senate Bill No. 191, which establishes the Hawaii Home Energy Assistance Program (H-HEAP) within the Department of Human Services and enhances energy efficiency support via the Public Utilities Commission's Public Benefits Fee Administrator. Hawaii's exorbitant electricity costs and inadequate federal aid demand this state-led solution. Below, I highlight critical data underscoring the need, note gaps in the bill, and propose amendments to maximize its impact. I urge your "yes" vote with these enhancements.

Hawaii's energy crisis disproportionately harms low-income households:

- Punishing Electricity Rates: Hawaii's rates are the nation's highest, averaging 40 cents per kilowatt-hour—nearly triple the U.S. average of 14 cents (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2024 data). Costs fluctuate with imported fuel prices and renewable integration, hitting residents hard.
- Struggling Families: Per the 2022 "ALICE in Hawaii" report by Aloha United Way, 44% of households—over 200,000 families—live below the ALICE threshold, employed yet unable to afford basics like electricity amidst rising costs.
- Utility Debt Surge: Post-COVID, thousands of customers face disconnection, owing millions collectively, per the bill's findings. This reflects a growing affordability gap.
- Climate-Driven Demand: Average temperatures have risen 2°F over the past century (National Weather Service), boosting cooling needs. EIA data shows residential electricity use in Hawaii jumped 5% from 2020-2023 due to hotter summers.

Federal LIHEAP falls short:

- Limited Reach: In 2020, it served fewer than 9,000 households—about 2% of eligible residents (Public Utilities Commission, December 2022). With 450,000+ households statewide (U.S. Census), this is a drop in the bucket.
- Starved Funding: Hawaii received just 0.14% of federal LIHEAP funds in 2021-2022, the lowest nationally (National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition), half the next-lowest state's share, due to a 1984 formula ignoring our electricity cost crisis.

S.B. No. 191 is a vital step forward:

- **H-HEAP Creation:** A \$5 million annual appropriation for 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 funds one permanent and two temporary positions, system upgrades, and services to assist eligible households with energy costs.
- **Efficiency Support:** The Public Benefits Fee Administrator will offer audits and efficiency aid. In 2023, small-scale solar generated 19% of Hawaii's electricity (EIA), showing efficiency's potential to cut bills.

**Gaps and Proposed Amendments:** While S.B. No. 191 is promising, it lacks clarity and ambition in key areas. I propose the following enhancements:

- **Broader Eligibility Criteria:**
  - **Issue:** The bill leaves income eligibility to departmental rules, risking overly restrictive limits.
  - **Data:** The federal LIHEAP caps eligibility at 150% of the poverty line or 60% of state median income, yet Hawaii's cost of living—37% above the U.S. average (Missouri Economic Research, 2024)—suggests this is too low.
  - **Amendment:** Mandate eligibility up to 200% of the federal poverty line (e.g., \$62,000 for a family of four in 2025) or 75% of state median income, reflecting Hawaii's economic reality and capturing more ALICE households.
- **Sustainable Funding Mechanism:**
  - **Issue:** The \$5 million appropriation expires after 2026-2027, leaving H-HEAP's future uncertain.
  - **Data:** Hawaii's energy transition requires \$26 billion by 2045 (Hawaii State Energy Office), yet low-income aid is underfunded. Federal LIHEAP's \$3.7 billion nationally in 2023 dwarfed Hawaii's share.
  - **Amendment:** Establish a permanent funding stream, such as a 0.5% surcharge on utility bills (exempting low-income households), projected to raise \$10-12 million annually based on 2023 utility revenues of \$2.4 billion (EIA), ensuring long-term stability.
- **Efficiency Targets and Incentives:**
  - **Issue:** The bill mandates efficiency assistance but sets no goals or funding for implementation.
  - **Data:** Efficiency upgrades can cut energy use 15-30% (American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy), saving \$200-\$500 annually per household at Hawaii's rates.
  - **Amendment:** Require 50% of H-HEAP recipients to receive efficiency upgrades by 2027, funded by allocating \$1 million of the appropriation to subsidize solar panels, insulation, or AC retrofits, leveraging Hawaii's 2045 renewable goal.
- **Outreach and Education:**
  - **Issue:** No provisions ensure awareness or accessibility, risking low uptake like federal LIHEAP's 2% reach.
  - **Data:** Only 20% of eligible U.S. households apply for LIHEAP nationally (HHS, 2023), often due to poor outreach.



- Amendment: Add a \$250,000 annual budget for community outreach, partnering with nonprofits like Aloha United Way, to boost applications and educate on efficiency programs.
- Earlier Effective Date:
  - Issue: The December 31, 2050, effective date delays relief for decades, likely a drafting error.
  - Amendment: Change to July 1, 2025, aligning with the fiscal year and urgent need.

Conclusion: S.B. No. 191 is a moral and economic imperative, supporting our 44% ALICE population—essential workers and families—amid rising costs and climate pressures. With these amendments, it can deliver immediate, lasting relief and align with Hawaii's renewable future. I urge you to adopt these enhancements and vote "yes" to uplift our most vulnerable residents.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to Hawaii's people.

Sincerely,

Master Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire, HRM

Ohana Unity Party, Chairman

[www.Ohanaunityparty.com](http://www.Ohanaunityparty.com)

Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands

# TAX FOUNDATION OF HAWAII

735 Bishop Street, Suite 417

Honolulu, Hawaii 96813 Tel. 536-4587

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

BILL NUMBER: SB 191 SD 1

INTRODUCED BY: Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

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: December 31, 2050.

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." These are not purely technical choices, so policymakers should set some policy guardrails.

Digested: 3/11/2025



**House Committees on Energy and the Environment & Human Services and  
Homelessness**

**Testimony on SB 191**

**Relating to Energy Assistance**

**March 13th, 2025**

**11:15 AM**

**Room 325**

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 Lowen, Chair Marten, Vice Chair Perruso, Vice Chair Olds, and Members of the Committees:

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



**HOUSE COMMITTEES ON ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION  
and HUMAN SERVICES AND HOMELESSNESS**

**MARCH 13, 2025**

**SB 191, SD1, RELATING TO ENERGY ASSISTANCE**

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

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

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](mailto:info@coalitionearth.org).*

**SB-191-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 1:18:04 PM

Testimony for EEP on 3/13/2025 11:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ellen Awai	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

## Comments:

I stand in strong support of SB191.SD1. I have a difficult time paying the electricity bills. I especially had difficulty when the property owner refused to fix my air-conditioner in my unit and both would turn on/off by itself, which made the cost even higher during September when I really needed it, and I face the East towards the setting sun in Ewa. Please support this bill when sometimes we have no control and we either dying of the heat, like my neighbor who needed to fans on him or freezing at night when A/c turns on by itself.

**SB-191-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 1:37:23 PM

Testimony for EEP on 3/13/2025 11:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Douglas Perrine	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Improving energy efficiency is the most cost-effective way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. I support SB191 which will not only improve energy efficiency, but also help low-income families save on their energy bills.



**SB-191-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/11/2025 12:03:18 PM

Testimony for EEP on 3/13/2025 11:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elizabeth Kiefer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**In Support of SB 191: Relating to Energy Assistance**

Aloha Chair Lowen, Chair Marten, Vice Chair Perruso, Vice Chair Olds, and Members of the Committees:

I strongly support 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. I 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.

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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, I strongly urge 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,

Elizabeth Kiefer, MD MPH

## **In Support of S.B. 191 SD1**

### **RELATING TO ENERGY ASSISTANCE.**

Aloha Chair Lowen, Chair Marten, Vice Chair Perruso, Vice Chair Olds, and Members of the Committees.

My name is Annabel Arase, and I support S.B. 191 SD1'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 burden, 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 SB 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 SD1.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

Sincerely,  
Annabel Arase