



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
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS
KA 'OIHANA PILI KĀLEPA
335 MERCHANT STREET, ROOM 310
P.O. BOX 541
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96809
Phone Number: (808) 586-2850
Fax Number: (808) 586-2856
cca.hawaii.gov

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
Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection
And
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Wednesday, February 26, 2025
10:00 a.m.
Conference Room 211

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

WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY

Chair Keohokalole, Chair Dela Cruz, 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

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR



STATE OF HAWAII
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
465 S. KING STREET, #103
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

LEODOLOFF R. ASUNCION, JR.
CHAIR

NAOMI U. KUWAYE
COMMISSIONER

COLIN A. YOST
COMMISSIONER

Telephone: (808) 586-2020
Facsimile: (808) 586-2066

Website: puc.hawaii.gov
E-mail: puc@hawaii.gov

Testimony of the Public Utilities Commission

To the
Senate Committees on
Commerce & Consumer Protection
and
Ways & Means

February 26, 2025
10:00 a.m.

Chairs Keohokalole and Dela Cruz, Vice Chairs Fukunaga and Moriwaki, 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.¹ This group has met regularly since then, most recently on February 18, 2025.

¹ 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.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 (~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. 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.”



**Hawaiian
Electric**

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON WAYS AND MEANS &
COMMERCE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION**

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

February 26, 2025
10:00 AM
State Capitol, Conference Room 211

Noelle Kakimoto
Equity, Access & Affordability Manager
Hawaiian Electric

Dear Chairs Dela Cruz and Keohokalole, Vice Chairs Moriwaki and Fukunaga, and
Members of the Committees,

My name is Noelle Kakimoto and I am submitting written testimony 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 submit written testimony.



Before the Senate Committees on Ways and Means, and Commerce and Consumer Protection
Wednesday, February 26, 2025 at 10:00 a.m.

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

Chairs Dela Cruz and Keohokalole, Vice Chairs Moriwaki and Fukunaga, 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

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

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 virtually unlimited discretion to set the requirements.

Digested: 2/21/2025

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

TRISTA SPEER
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
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

February 24, 2025

TO: The Honorable Senator Jarrett Keohokalole, Chair
Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection

The Honorable Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

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

Hearing: Wednesday, February 26, 2025, 10:00 a.m.
Conference Room 211 & 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 better serve 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 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.

OFFICE OF CLIMATE CHANGE SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCY
KE KE'ENA LOLI ANIAU MĀLAMA 'ĀINA A ME KE OLA LOA
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

650 SOUTH KING STREET, 11th FLOOR • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813
PHONE: (808) 768-2277 • EMAIL: resilientoahu@honolulu.gov • INTERNET: www.resilientoahu.org

LATE

LATE

RICK BLANGIARDI
MAYOR
MEIA



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

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

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2025, 10:00 A.M.

STATE OF HAWAII
SENATE COMMITTEES ON COMMERCE & CONSUMER PROTECTION AND
WAYS AND MEANS

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

BY,

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

Dear Chair Keohokalole, Chair Dela Cruz, and Members of the Committees:

The City and County of Honolulu ("City") Office of Climate Change, Sustainability and Resiliency ("Resilience Office") **supports** SB191, SD1, 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, 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.

**LATE****LATE**

CATHOLIC CHARITIES HAWAII

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

TO: Senate Committees on Ways and Means and Commerce and Consumer Protection
FROM: Tina Andrade, President and CEO, Catholic Charities Hawaii
Hearing: Wednesday, 2/26/25, 10:00 AM; CR 211 & Videoconference

Chair Dela Cruz, Chair Keohokalole, and Members, Committees on Ways and Means and Commerce and Consumer Protection:

Catholic Charities Hawaii **supports HB 191 SD1**, which establishes the Hawaii Home Energy Assistance program within the Department of Human Services (DHS) to help low-income households to pay their energy bills.

Catholic Charities Hawaii (CCH) is a tax exempt, non-profit agency that has been providing social services in Hawaii for over 77 years. CCH has programs serving elders, children, families, homeless and immigrants. Our mission is to provide services and advocacy to the most vulnerable of the people in Hawaii. We participate in the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) initiative and other initiatives to assist our local residents as they face the high cost of living in Hawaii.

Hawaii 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. Along with the large increase in the cost of living, there are fewer resources to assist those in need. While the Rental & Utility Relief program (RURP) in the City and County of Honolulu provided about \$225 million in assistance, it has now closed, leaving families with few options.

Catholic Charities Hawaii urges your support for the **Hawaii 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 Hawaii's energy affordability crisis.

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

Catholic
Charities
USA

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





LATE

February 24, 2025

Committee on Ways and Means
Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection

Subject: **Testimony In Support of S.B. 191 SD1 - RELATING TO ENERGY ASSISTANCE.**

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Chair Keohokalole, Vice Chair Moriwaki, Vice Chair Fukunaga, and Members of the Committees,

VEIC is in strong support of S.B. 191 SD1's goal of creating a Hawai'i Home Energy Assistance Program to assist Hawai'i families in paying their utility bills.

VEIC is a national nonprofit focused on reducing the economic and environmental costs of energy use. One of the best ways to address energy affordability for those who need it most is through the installation of efficient equipment to drive down energy costs and get out of a pattern of needing assistance to pay for their energy bills.

The reality is Hawai'i families face incredibly high energy burden, particularly those who are already struggling. Just last year over 20% of Hawai'i families reported foregoing critical expenses such as food or medicine to pay their energy bill in full last year. Compounding the problem, the current federal funding for home energy assistance (Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program) remains inadequate for our needs in Hawai'i. **Last year Hawai'i received the lowest amount of federal LIHEAP funding in the United States.**

The creation of a Hawai'i 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 Hawai'i families from having to choose between power and other basic necessities.

As such, VEIC strongly supports the creation of a Hawai'i Home Energy Assistance Program through S.B. 191 SD1.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Kealoha".

Brian Kealoha, Chief Growth & Impact Officer

In Support of S.B. 191 SD1

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RELATING TO ENERGY ASSISTANCE.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Chair Keohokalole, Vice Chair Moriwaki, Vice Chair Fukunaga, and Members of the Committees.

My name is Robin Fakaosi, 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,
Robin Fakaosi

LATE

SB-191-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2025 3:37:09 PM

Testimony for CPN on 2/26/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Charmaine Kahealani Hauanio-Kuewa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In Support of S.B. 191 SD1

RELATING TO ENERGY ASSISTANCE.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Chair Keohokalole, Vice Chair Moriwaki, Vice Chair Fukunaga, and Members of the Committees.

My name is Charmaine K. Hauanio-Kuewa, 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,

Charmaine K. Hauanio-Kuewa

LATE

SB-191-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2025 5:48:12 PM

Testimony for CPN on 2/26/2025 10:00:00 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 Keohokalole, Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Fukunaga, Vice Chair Moriwaki, 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.

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, 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

SB-191-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2025 8:40:41 AM

Testimony for CPN on 2/26/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
James McCallen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Keohokalole, Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Fukunaga, Vice Chair Moriwaki, 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.

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, 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,

James McCallen, MPH

LATE



Senate Committees on Commerce and Consumer Protections & Ways and Means

Testimony on SB 191

Relating to Energy Assistance

February 26th, 2025

10:00 AM

Room 211

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 provides critical funding for the Hawai'i Invasive Species Council to address the growing threat invasive species pose to our ecosystems, public health, and communities.

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

In Support of SB 191

Relating to Energy Assistance

Aloha Chair Keohokalole, Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Fukunaga, Vice Chair Moriwaki, 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.

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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

SB-191-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2025 2:38:36 PM

Testimony for CPN on 2/26/2025 10:00:00 AM

LATE

LATE

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jacob Lee, MD	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a practicing psychiatrist in Hawaii, I have witnessed firsthand the detrimental effects that high electricity costs can have on my patients and their families. Many of my patients live at or below the ALICE threshold and are already struggling to make ends meet, which exacerbates their mental health challenges. The financial stress of looming utility bills often leads to increased anxiety and depression, impacting not only the individual but the entire household. This proposed Hawaii home energy assistance program would provide much-needed relief to these families by reducing their financial burden and allowing them to focus on their well-being. By supporting this bill, you would be taking a significant step toward improving the mental health and stability of countless families in our community. I urge you to consider the positive impact this program could have on the mental health of vulnerable populations in our state. Your support for this initiative is vital to foster a healthier and more resilient community.