



March 1, 2020

Senator Dembrow,

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) would like to indicate our strong support for HB 4067A. We want to explain why we enthusiastically endorse this important bill.

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EMO serves diverse communities of faith throughout our state through a membership of 15 denominations and over 150 congregations, organizations and interfaith partners. As you know, one of our major priorities has been encouraging strong climate legislation. This is based on our shared conviction in the need for being wise and conscientious environmental stewards and protectors of God's amazing creation for all generations to come and all forms of life. We have given particular attention to finding ways to support the needs of traditionally marginalized communities from an environmental justice standpoint; these are communities HB 4067A refers to as "impacted communities."

In early December, EMO hosted a meeting of approximately 40 faith leaders from around the state for a gathering at the Claremont School of Theology at Willamette University entitled, A Community Response to Climate Change. At our gathering we listened to representatives of several environmental justice communities whose people are already suffering from climate change impacts. It became clear that these communities are diverse. They include black, indigenous, and other communities of color that often face poverty and institutionalized racism. They also include some rural and coastal communities that are geographically isolated, dependent on natural resources, and have limited access to public transportation, inexpensive housing, and other services and resources that are more available in urban areas. And they include many seniors, youth, and people with disabilities. These communities have one barrier in common: they are more likely to be impacted by environmental and health hazards, but less likely to have the skills and resources to participate in public processes that would give them the opportunity to inform and influence decision makers to identify and address these problems.

For the same reasons we have advocated for the needs of environmental justice communities in other legislation over the years, we believe HB 4067A will go a long way toward supporting the participation of traditionally marginalized communities in utility regulation and reducing the financial burdens of families who are most seriously impacted by rising energy utility bills.

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HB 4067A does three important things:

- 1) It provides the Oregon Public Utility Commission (OPUC) with the authority to allow utilities to offer rate designs and discounts that can help reduce energy cost burdens for low-income and other underserved customers. It makes available a new toolbox and directs the OPUC to hold a transparent process through which stakeholders and utilities can sort out the best way to use these tools. We are pleased to see that both Portland General Electric and Pacific Power support this approach.
- 2) It allows organizations that represent environmental justice communities, including rural communities, to access intervenor funding to participate in regulatory processes in the same way that broader customer groups, such as the Citizens Utility Board of Oregon (CUB) and the Association of Western Energy Consumers do now. As other supporters of this bill have noted in their testimony, organizations representing broad interests cannot always capture the more localized nuances and needs of specific environmental justice communities. Without secure intervenor funding, small organizations representing these smaller but still important environmental justice communities could not afford to participate in utility rate cases and other proceedings. We are pleased to see that a more traditional utility policy stakeholder like CUB, an organization that has been such a valuable resource as Oregon's designated advocate for investor-owned utility residential utility customers for 36 years, is also an active supporter of this bill.
- 3) It defines environmental justice and environmental justice communities in Oregon law. This will provide needed clarity for policymakers, stakeholders, and program implementers.

In conclusion, we view HB 4067A as a valuable and important bill, and represents an important step in the direction of equity as Oregonians attempt to address the intersecting issues surrounding climate change and sustainable natural resource use. We must ensure that we achieve our climate goals and support a more flexible and greener electric grid in a way that ensures that the genuine needs of all stakeholders are identified and addressed.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon  
Creation Justice Committee