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## Oregon Faith Movement

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Chair Marsh, Vice-Chair Brock Smith, Vice-Chair Helm and members of the Committee:

Through eight service programs and a membership of 15 denominations and over 150 congregations, organizations, and interfaith partners, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) and Oregon Interfaith Power & Light (OIPL) serve hundreds of thousands of diverse members of the faith community all across the state. In line with the mandates of the diverse faiths to which our members belong, EMO/OIPL seeks through its service to “defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:8-9), among which is access to clean, affordable energy.

EMO/OIPL wishes to state our support for HB 2475, the Energy Affordability Act sponsored by the Oregon Clean Energy Opportunity campaign. This bill, which is desperately overdue after failing to pass in past sessions, will provide essential, long-term relief to rural, low-income and BIPOC communities by allowing utilities to provide flexible rate structures. It will also allow the organizations that know these communities best to advocate effectively on their behalf.

During this pandemic, investor-owned utilities have voluntarily instituted moratoria on utility shutoffs. However, this is only a temporary solution to a long-standing problem, which will likely be even worse than before the pandemic once moratoria are lifted. In 2018, around 433,000 Oregon households were energy-burdened, meaning they spent over 6% of their monthly income on energy bills. These households were disproportionately rural and low-income. The three most energy-burdened counties were Malheur County, Lake County, and Wheeler County, where almost 50% of residents experienced energy burden. Among low-income households, some families had to spend 38% of their monthly income on energy bills alone.

Allowing Oregonians to spend over a third of their monthly income on a basic necessity, which is proportionally much cheaper for higher-earners, is scandalous, especially during an economic crisis and a public health emergency. HB 2475 will mitigate this unjust reality, while simultaneously saving utilities money and keeping costs down for *all* ratepayers, whose bills increase when arrearages pile up.

This bill also frees up important resources for community-based organizations that represent energy-burdened communities. There are many such organizations across the state that represent environmental justice communities, low-income communities, and other communities facing unreasonable energy costs. These organizations need access to existing programs that fund the research, time and consultation required to participate fully in regulatory proceedings. HB 2475 will allow

community-based utility customer advocates to access the same funding that general utility customer advocates currently receive.

As people of faith, we affirm the God-given dignity of every person, and we believe that access to affordable utilities is an essential part of respecting human dignity. We know that those whose right to affordable utilities is denied are those whom our society systematically excludes and oppresses in countless other ways. We join our voices with those in the Oregon Clean Energy Opportunity campaign in insisting that Oregon's energy be clean, affordable, and affirmative of human dignity.

We hope and pray your legislative deliberations maintain focus on caring for low-income Oregonians, especially energy-burdened families and communities, and we pray for your health and safety in this time of pandemic. Know that your gatherings are covered in our prayers as you represent us and make decisions that shape our collective future.

Sincerely yours,

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon/Oregon Interfaith Power & Light, Creation Justice Programs