

UM 2225 HB 2021 Clean Energy Plans Resiliency
HB 2021 Community Advocates' Comments on Resiliency
Respectfully submitted December 15, 2022

About the HB 2021 Community Advocates Cohort: This group of 12 community members from across Oregon have been meeting with Energy Advocates and organizers for the past three months from Oregon Just Transition Alliance, Verde, Rogue Climate, Coalition of Communities of Color, Northwest Energy Foundation, and Multnomah County Office of Sustainability. These Community Advocates recently shared their personal stories, reflections, and ideas for resiliency. These leaders are engaged, passionate, and learning more about our energy systems in Oregon all the time. They are BIPOC, English and Spanish-speaking, students, activists, business owners, government administrators, a Tribal member, organizer, and community leaders.

Below are comments from six Community Advocates. (We have left in the questions we prompted community members with, in case they are helpful in learning ways to ask questions that encourage engagement.)

"I have felt let down by the energy system many times in my life. When I was growing up, I lived in a home for a while that was closer to the coast, and I remember the power going out every year for multiple days, sometimes for weeks on end. This was occasionally due to vandalism, but sometimes due to turbulent weather. It was frustrating to not know when the power would be back on, and it was more difficult for other families, particularly families living with elderly folks. When it's cold out, that's usually when the power is lost, and that can be really dangerous for older, younger, or disabled/medically-reliant folks.

It's also infuriating when power companies are responsible for natural disasters themselves. They should be held accountable, even more so than they have been in past environmental blunders.

★ *Reflect on a time when you dealt with an energy outage or any time of energy unreliability. What happened? Did you lose food items or have to go somewhere else to access energy? Anything at risk? What should be improved?*

Yes, we would usually lose a freezer worth of food when the power went out. Since we lived in so many rural spaces, we usually had an alternative heat source, like a wood stove in the house. I realize now that these can heat homes effectively, but also pose their own risks to people living in a house with a fire burning inside of it. It reminds me of recent studies that show the danger and health risk of having a gas stove, even if it's a new model. We should make sure that every community (no matter how large or how small) has a backup energy source, even if that means installing two renewable sources locally, or having extra battery backups, while also having access to the greater electrical grid while we make the transition.

★ *How are other issues linked to energy burden or energy unreliability? (social justice, racial justice, disability justice, housing justice, climate justice, etc)*

It's apparent to me that all kinds of people are affected by the power grid and have the potential to suffer an energy burden. That being said, folks who are affected by social, racial, and economic burdens seem to be additionally challenged when it comes to having access to reliable energy. In my experience, racial justice and environmental justice are one in the same, in that, work towards alleviating one must also work toward alleviating the other. These groups are constantly targeted and oftentimes people who are not in decision making-positions are negatively affected by the results. This is also linked to housing justice in the means of economics. All over the country people are experiencing a housing crisis, and the cost of building materials and labor is through the roof, so there's no idea of when we can meet this demand.

- Alec Perrone, Rogue River, Ashland Climate Collaborative

★ *Was there a time you felt vulnerable to or let down by the energy system? How did that feel? How would you want that to change?*

A: Yes, when they got home to pay or cut off the power, I knew that there were no chances for my family to avoid the power disconnection.

I felt helpless because I knew their inflexibility, no matter how much I could explain or plead, they would proceed if they did not have the payment in their hands at that moment.

I wish there were more options for people who don't qualify for government programs or because of their legal status and fewer requirements when there are children in a home.

★ *Reflect on a time when you dealt with an energy outage or any time of energy unreliability. What happened? Did you lose food items or have to go somewhere else to access energy? Anything at risk? What should be improved?*

A: It breaks me to see my elementary school age children not being able to do their homework due to lack of energy. See them cold for not being able to use a heater. I felt the lack of empathy from the Department of Energy.

At times when I was able to avoid power outages, I had to give up rent and face late fees for not having the full amount.

Feeling that we could lose the food in the fridge due to lack of light, such as milk and other dairy products. Lose the few food reserves for the fortnight. Just remembering it breaks my heart for

my children that although they are now adults, I would not want any family to go through that situation.

Take into account the basic needs of children in those places, the elderly or people with disabilities and have special programs that are easy to access without so much bureaucracy.

★ *How are other issues linked to energy burden or energy unreliability? (social justice, racial justice, disability justice, housing justice, climate justice, etc)*

A: A domino effect is caused when power cuts are made in low-income families or with little or no access to assistance programs, such as; they lose physical and/or mental health when experiencing these needs and frustrations, they are affected by the extra charges for disconnection and reconnection. The few resources are lost, traumas are caused at the family level, etc, etc.

★ *Are there any questions that you need answered? Any statistics or facts that can strengthen your position?*

A: Yes. Where is the equity? How can you be so inhumane? How can I receive help if I don't meet the most absurd requirements? income? What if I don't qualify for help when only \$20 dollars are set aside from the qualifying tables for low income? And many other questions to list.

For example: in Washington County, 37% of the population is below the poverty line and they are Latinos.”

- Maria Dolores Torres, Beaverton, Adelante Mujeres

★ *Was there a time you felt vulnerable to or let down by the energy system? How did that feel? How would you want that to change?*

I personally haven't been affected by the energy system as I still live with my parents but I would like to see more renewable energy opportunities for rent owners.

★ *Reflect on a time when you dealt with an energy outage or any time of energy unreliability. What happened? Did you lose food items or have to go somewhere else to access energy? Anything at risk? What should be improved?*

At some point I did deal with energy outage but I was privileged enough to have a safe place where I could've stayed. I will say that I heard that while I had power her parents' house didn't and they are older people with health disabilities. I think that if priority were given to people like that it would be good.

- ★ *How are other issues linked to energy burden or energy unreliability? (social justice, racial justice, disability justice, housing justice, climate justice, etc)*

Under-represented low income communities, usually POC are the ones most affected.

- ★ Are there any questions that you need answered? Any statistics or facts that can strengthen your position?

I would like to know if they prioritize older/ POC folks or what their response time is for these communities.

- Perla Salazar, Medford

- ★ Was there a time you felt vulnerable to or let down by the energy system? How did that feel? How would you want that to change

Frequent power outages and not enough follow up is very frustrating. It's hard to save important information via computer systems etc. Electricity is very important necessity that is needed. I imagine it can be difficult to resolve issues of many people but having clear information keeps me at ease.

- ★ Reflect on a time when you dealt with an energy outage or any time of energy unreliability. What happened? Did you lose food items or have to go somewhere else to access energy? Anything at risk? What should be improved?

Many times when I got my first apartment I had consistent power outages. Not knowing how long I would be dealing with it and not having the tools to get by without it was a big hardship for me. I had to toss food, remain in the dark for long periods of time, lost a document I was working on online. I also felt unsafe in my apartment due to the area. Receiving updates would have helped me just to feel better and have some hope. Consistent updates would be nice.

- ★ *How are other issues linked to energy burden or energy unreliability? (social justice, racial justice, disability justice, housing justice, climate justice, etc)*

When household income is affected there is a lot to think about in relation to what they are able to pay for. Heat in your home and transportation are important components in relation to living. Not having fair and equitable division of resources takes away from opportunity and specific privileges in society. Any system that works against people specific to the barriers in their lives becomes a huge detriment in all aspects.

- Sadie Atwell, Portland

“Community benefits should be at the center of decision making when it comes to the development and transition of energy systems. Reducing our energy consumption AND reducing energy burden, as well as increasing energy independence for local communities, are important to help both local and global communities have access to energy without harm.

★ *Your big vision:*

That we can find solutions that are based on care and sacredness for both people and the environment.

★ *Your immediate goals:*

- Get community members that would be most impacted by decisions, into the decision making table, without it becoming burdensome or overwhelming.
- Centering values of wellbeing for all when making decisions. Having this be a top priority.

★ *What is at risk:*

People are continuously being let down and/or harmed by our energy system. Kids, elders, people with disabilities, and more having to bear the brunt of an unreliable and expensive energy system. This is and has been life threatening. Not having access to cooling, heating, clean air, or communications, especially during extreme weather, is unjust.

We also need to take into account the continuing and exacerbating effects of climate change on so many of our resources, including water. So many energy systems take up so much water, yet I don't hear these considerations from people when talking about plans for new project developments.”

- Alessandra de la Torre, Phoenix, Rogue Climate

★ Was there a time you felt vulnerable to or let down by the energy system? How did that feel? How would you want that to change?

I grew up with outages frequently. But we were in Colombia and I was a kid. We were used to hot temperatures and never had a fan or AC so losing power did not change that. We did not have winter so heating was not a concern. To me as a kid it was normal. It was play time.

But I imagine it was stressful for my mom and my grandma because everything went dark and I was out playing. That would make me nervous as a parent. Plus they were the ones that had to

think about food spoiling, etc. I think a lot about how stressed they must have been. Specially during times when we were already working to make ends meet.

- ★ Reflect on a time when you dealt with an energy outage or any time of energy unreliability. What happened? Did you lose food items or have to go somewhere else to access energy? Anything at risk? What should be improved?

I have not lost power long enough to lose the food in my freezer, though I have lost the food in my fridge and my house has gotten really cold. It was earlier in the pandemic so we did not feel comfortable going to another house, though we knew if it got colder we would. That day I was so cold and working hard to keep my son warm. I think it awoke me to the reality of disconnection impacts in winter and the importance of fighting for better disconnection policies in winter.

- ★ How are other issues linked to energy burden or energy unreliability? (social justice, racial justice, disability justice, housing justice, climate justice, etc)

I saw the NAACP's Report Lights Out in the Cold that talks about how Black and Latinx people are more likely to be disconnected for the same debt than white people are. I also remember hearing from the former advocate at Community Action Partnership of Oregon that households that are disconnected are like 30% more likely to be evicted compared to other households. When you combine factors like economic and racial injustice (with quantifiable impacts in wages for people depending on race), environmental injustice that forces BIPOC folks to be more statistically likely to live around polluted air, soil, and water, the injustice of this pandemic's impacts, it feels like energy burden is just one more thing that can sink a family despite of how hard they try. It can be that drop that makes the cup spill.

- Silvia Tanner, Portland, Multnomah County Office of Sustainability