
SENATE RESOLUTION

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 HAWAII LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM TO ASSIST LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS WITH PAYING FOR THEIR HOME ENERGY.

1 WHEREAS, the Department of Business, Economic Development,
2 and Tourism states in its July 2021 report, "Electricity Burdens
3 on Hawaii Households", that household electricity burden, the
4 percentage of household income spent on electricity bills, is
5 one of the key elements contributing to a household's energy
6 insecurity, especially for low-income households; and
7

8 WHEREAS, Hawaii's electricity rates are one of the highest
9 in the nation, at close to three times the national average, and
10 vary based on availability of renewable resources, power plants,
11 fuel costs, and pricing regulations; and
12

13 WHEREAS, the 2020 report commissioned by the Aloha United
14 Way, "ALICE in Hawaii: A Financial Hardship Study", states that
15 forty-two percent of households in the State live below the
16 ALICE (asset limited, income constrained, employed) threshold,
17 meaning that almost half of all families in Hawaii are
18 struggling to make ends meet, even though they are employed; and
19

20 WHEREAS, nine percent of these ALICE families are living in
21 poverty, and this trend has progressively worsened in recent
22 years due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic;
23 and
24

25 WHEREAS, national survey results show that households below
26 the ALICE threshold fared significantly worse than households
27 above the ALICE threshold during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite
28 the added protective measures of eviction moratoria and food
29 assistance programs; and
30



1 WHEREAS, the electric utility companies in the State
2 reported that for the month of December 2021, 6,225 customers
3 became eligible for service disconnection due to nonpayment of
4 bills; and

5
6 WHEREAS, the electric utility companies also reported that
7 they entered into 2,974 payment plan agreements with customers
8 to allow those customers to pay off their unpaid bills over an
9 extended period of time; and

10
11 WHEREAS, in response to the devastating impacts of the
12 COVID-19 pandemic, the American Rescue Plan of 2021 authorized
13 the United States Department of the Treasury's Emergency Rental
14 Assistance Program to help households that are unable to pay
15 rent or utilities; and

16
17 WHEREAS, in Hawaii, these federal funds are being
18 distributed by each county through the Rental and Utility
19 Assistance Programs and are scheduled to end by September 30,
20 2025; and

21
22 WHEREAS, once the federal funding from the Emergency Rental
23 Assistance Program ends, it is anticipated that low-income
24 households will still require utility payment assistance to
25 prevent service terminations; and

26
27 WHEREAS, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program
28 (LIHEAP) is a federally-funded, state-administered energy
29 program that has been in existence since 1981; and

30
31 WHEREAS, the purpose of LIHEAP is to assist low-income
32 households, particularly those with the lowest incomes, that pay
33 a high proportion of household income for home energy; and

34
35 WHEREAS, LIHEAP prevents low-income families from having to
36 choose between paying for their electric utility bills or
37 purchasing necessary medication and food; and

38
39 WHEREAS, the federal Administration for Children and
40 Families' Office of Community Services notes that being
41 qualified for LIHEAP does not guarantee that a person in need
42 will receive help because LIHEAP assistance disbursements depend



1 on the amount of LIHEAP funds available for the year; once funds
2 run out for the year, further benefits cannot be distributed
3 until more funds are made available by Congress; and
4

5 WHEREAS, according to Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity,
6 fewer than nine thousand Hawaii households, or about two
7 percent, participated in LIHEAP in 2020; now, therefore,
8

9 BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Thirty-first
10 Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2022,
11 that the Public Utilities Commission, in collaboration with the
12 Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs' Division of
13 Consumer Advocacy, is requested to convene a working group to
14 create a Hawaii Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program to
15 assist low-income households with paying for their home energy;
16 and
17

18 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the working group consist of
19 the following:
20

- 21 (1) One representative from the Public Utilities
22 Commission;
- 23
24 (2) One representative from the Department of Commerce and
25 Consumer Affairs' Division of Consumer Advocacy;
26
- 27 (3) One representative from the Department of Human
28 Services' Division of Benefit, Employment and Support
29 Services;
30
- 31 (4) One representative from the Department of Labor and
32 Industrial Relations' Office of Community Services;
33
- 34 (5) One representative from the Hawaii State Energy
35 Office;
36
- 37 (6) One representative from each electric utility
38 operating in the State;
- 39
- 40 (7) The Chairperson of the House of Representatives
41 Standing Committee on Energy and Environmental
42 Protection;



1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21

- (8) The Chairperson of the Senate Standing Committee on Energy, Economic Development, and Tourism; and
- (9) One representative from Hawaii Energy; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the working group is requested to submit a report of its findings and recommendations, including any proposed legislation, to the Legislature and Governor no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the Regular Session of 2023; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this Resolution be transmitted to the Director of Human Services, Director of Commerce and Consumer Affairs, Consumer Advocate, Director of Labor and Industrial Relations, Chairperson of the Public Utilities Commission, Chief Energy Officer of the Hawaii State Energy Office, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Hawaiian Electric Company, Chairperson of the Kauai Island Utility Cooperative Board of Directors, and Executive Director of Hawaii Energy.

