

ENERGY JUSTICE IN HOUSING WORKING GROUP

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Charge

Low-income Vermonters have disproportionately higher energy burdens than higher income households; in New England, the energy burden on low-income households is estimated to be three times higher than the median. As noted in the 2022 updated Comprehensive Energy Plan, “the burdens and benefits of energy policy in Vermont have not been equitably distributed across the state or its citizens.”

Residential buildings account for one-fifth of the nation’s greenhouse gas emissions. Reducing the carbon footprint of our residential buildings is a critical component of the state’s Climate Action Plan, and that effort is largely guided by the state’s energy plan and policies which are focused on energy efficiency in buildings.

If equity is a policy goal in reduction of our carbon footprint, then it must be matched with incentives and considerations targeted to low- and moderate-income Vermonters. For example, most installed energy incentives for new construction are the same for all households, regardless of income.

With each new construction and renovation of residential buildings, we make choices in the context of the climate crisis and the housing crisis to achieve equitable results. To ignore the costs and affordability of energy is to ignore the need to build more housing, and the inequity of those decisions on lower income Vermonters.





Strategies

1. Revise statutory direction of all limited resources to change the way effectiveness is defined so it lifts underserved populations.
2. Rebuild the foundation of Vermont's energy incentives to address equity for low- and moderate-income Vermonters.
3. The effort to decarbonize Vermont's housing stock means moving large numbers of LMI households from fossil fuels to electrification. Acknowledge that the cost of decarbonization for rehabilitating existing housing greatly exceeds the current revenue sources that could mitigate the impact on the LMI community. Ensure that environmental justice populations and LMI households are first in line for the transition to clean energy technologies.
4. Set energy burden goals for LMI housing, which recognizes the disproportionate burden they pay for existing energy efficiency efforts, and track progress.
5. Remove barriers to participation for affordable multifamily housing.
6. Continue to enhance funding to the state's weatherization program as a critical component to Greenhouse Gas reduction and energy equity.
7. Find better ways to match and merge programs that address energy efficiency with those that tackle the broader health, safety, and structural needs of a residence for LMI households.

**The working group recognizes that transportation accounts for 30% of the greenhouse gas emissions in Vermont and there is a role for residential buildings in reducing greenhouse gases from transportation. For this working group's efforts, our focus is more on the single family and multifamily buildings and not transportation. We recognized that: by locating our housing in downtowns, village centers and growth centers, the location of that housing can mitigate some of the transportation energy burden for the resident. State housing policies strongly align with this locational benefit.*

Overarching Goal

Ensure equitable access to the benefits of energy efficiency, renewables, energy incentives for both lower income homeowners and renters as well as environmental justice populations. Embed energy justice in Vermont's energy priorities, through changes in policy that govern energy efficiency, renewable energy, weatherization, and other energy programs. By doing so, we will make Vermont's energy system more equitable and the benefits of the energy transformation more accessible to all Vermonters.

Equitable access will:

- Alleviate high energy burdens for low-income households
- Mitigate barriers to low- and moderate-income participation in energy efficiency programs
- Design energy incentives with a low- and moderate-income filter

Participants in the Energy Justice in Housing Working Group so far: Maura Collins & Mia Watson/VHFA, Gus Seelig & Craig Peltier/VHCB, Jim Merriam/Norwich Solar, Paul Zabriskie/Capstone, Kathy Beyer/Evernorth, Sarah Philips/VCLF.

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