

Dorothy Barnett
Climate + Energy Project
SB 278
Proponent – Oral Testimony



Chairman Olson, Vice Chair Peterson, Ranking member Francisco and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my proponent testimony for SB 278.

My name is Dorothy Barnett, I direct the Climate + Energy Project (CEP), a sixteen-year-old Kansas based nonprofit. CEP works to support the transition to a carbon free economy through programs and policy. Energy efficiency and renewable energy are not only good for our economy but good for our health and environment as well. CEP has been working to expand energy efficiency in Kansas since 2007. In the most recent Energy Efficiency docket, CEP witness Justin Schott from the University of Michigan focused on energy burden and energy efficiency and the need to collect data from utilities to ensure efficiency programs are targeted to those most in need.

Energy insecurity is endemic in the United States, affecting one in three households and half of Black and Latinx households. This energy insecurity is created by a structural inability for households to afford their energy costs; many spend two or three times more than the affordable limit of 6% of income recommended by the Environmental Protection Agency and energy affordability experts.

When experiencing energy insecurity, households forego other critical basic needs, such as healthy food and medical care. Many keep their homes at unsafe temperatures or accrue arrears in months when they are unable to pay. Shutoffs are the most serious form of energy insecurity, and for vulnerable household members, such as the elderly, young children, and people with a disability, shutoffs can be a matter of life and death.

Too often, energy insecurity affects children, who certainly have no role in their family's financial situation nor any ability to contribute to improving it. Just between November 2021 and January 2022, among households with children under 5, 44.7% reported difficulty paying their bill and a heartbreaking 28.8% had their power shutoff.

In Kansas, more than 33,000 Kansans live in poverty. Many face an energy burden up to four times the state average of 3%. In Evergy's territory alone, shutoff notices averaged 37,790 per month in 2022. Significant energy efficiency improvements, including air-sealing and insulation, air source heat pumps, and highly efficient appliances can dramatically lower energy bills for these customers who are unable to keep up and face shutoffs.

The Inflation Reduction Act provides a once in a generation opportunity to lower the energy burden of Kansans across the state with upfront discounts, rebates, and tax credits for home energy efficiency upgrades. To target homes with the highest energy burden for these resources, it is imperative that utilities and community-based organizations have access to information about customer assistance programs, account delinquencies and disconnections. Please support SB 278.