



February 18, 2021

Chair Helm, Vice-Chair's Owens and Reardon, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Community Action Partnership of Oregon (CAPO), I would like to express our support for House Bill 3089, designed to create a system to distribute water and sewer payment assistance to help low-income Oregonians.

Community Action helps build inclusive and caring communities across Oregon where people have equitable access to the services and resources they need to thrive. Community Action Agencies throughout the state fight poverty by providing a variety of services like food, shelter, housing, heating, weatherization, asset building, childcare, employment, and transportation for Oregonians in need, including seniors, children, migrant farmworkers, and those fleeing domestic violence. This past year during the COVID-19 pandemic, our network has served hundreds of thousands of Oregonians.

Throughout the state, we are seeing a tremendous need for assistance to prevent water and sewer utility shut-offs, which has only increased in the midst of today's public health crisis and recent catastrophic wildfires. Unlike the energy utility sector, there is currently no assistance in place for struggling families unable to pay for water and sewer services in Oregon. We appreciate Representative Leif's leadership on this issue and interest in creating a structure to fill the gap and bring much needed assistance to Oregonians.

In the latest COVID relief package, significant federal funds have been dedicated to water and sewer rate payment assistance. This creates an opportunity to collaboratively work together to create an immediate delivery system in the short-term to help families in need. It also illustrates the need to invest in a long-term delivery service that is efficient, equitable and complements existing programs, like energy assistance to enhance our ability to help Oregonians struggling to pay utility bills.

This past year, our network assisted 21,500 households throughout the state who were unable to pay energy bills, with emergency COVID-19 assistance. We have the capacity and willingness to work with stakeholders to create a similar system to provide much needed utility assistance to help water and sewer ratepayers. We also support legislation being pursued by Representative Leif (House Bill 2739) that would achieve the same goal of providing assistance for water and sewer ratepayers.

We ask that you join our network in supporting legislation to help provide assistance to help low-income Oregonians facing delinquent water and sewer accounts.

Sincerely,

Janet Merrell

Janet Merrell
Executive Director