

Opening Statement  
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Subcommittee on Energy  
Hearing on “Generating Equity: Improving Clean Energy Access and Affordability”  
October 1, 2020

I thank Chairman Rush for holding this important hearing on energy affordability and clean energy access. Chairman Rush has been passionately working on including communities of color in the clean energy transition, especially through his Blue Collar and Green Collar Jobs bill, and I thank him for his leadership.

Energy access and energy burdens often do not get the attention they deserve. Throughout the country, low-income households – particularly communities of color – face disproportionate negative impacts from traditional fossil generation due to their proximity to power plants and a lack of clean energy options. These communities see increased risks of polluted air and water, resulting in a greater likelihood of health conditions like asthma or cancer.

They also disproportionately suffer the devastating effects of fossil-fueled climate change, like severe damage and flooding to their homes from hurricanes. While we are all affected by climate change, we must make sure that no one is overlooked in our efforts to build a clean and resilient future.

Along with climate and environmental threats, communities of color are also disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Americans in all regions are suffering from job loss and are spending more time at home during this public health emergency. That means many of them are bringing home a lot less money than they were before the pandemic, and their energy bills are going up because they are using more energy at home. This is just pushing struggling families further to the edge.

As we experience a public health and economic crisis, unpaid electricity bills and the threat of electricity shutoffs should not be something struggling families are concerned about right now. However, 800,000 low-income customers are currently at risk of having their electricity shut off by their electric utility company. These communities, which already experience higher rates of COVID-19, are now being forced to deal with the potential loss of power.

This is an outrage, particularly since we included a moratorium on electricity and water shutoffs in the Heroes Act that passed in May. That was four and a half months ago, but Senate Republicans have refused to act. Now we are again working to protect these vulnerable communities with a shutoff moratorium in our updated Heroes legislation. It is long past time for President Trump and Senate Republicans to recognize the need to act.

This assistance is critical right now because the pandemic is only exacerbating an unfortunate trend that already existed – many struggling families face high energy burdens. They are spending a higher percentage of their paychecks on energy because of factors like income, location of where they live and the quality of the building where they live. And while low-income energy assistance programs exist, they have limited funding.

Fortunately, the updated Heroes Act includes \$4.5 billion for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, or LIHEAP. And last week the House passed the Clean Economy Jobs and Innovation Act, which included numerous bills from this Committee that support low-income clean energy projects, energy efficiency programs and rural energy development. This bill is a step in the right direction for a clean and equitable energy future.

The transition to a clean energy economy must be equitable and affordable. We must include all Americans in this enormous effort and ensure that no communities are abandoned to face the threats of climate change alone.