



Representatives Bride Rose Sweeney
Sponsor Testimony on H.B. 79
November 19, 2024

Chairman Reineke, Vice Chair McColley, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 79 alongside my colleague, Representative Seitz.

To put it simply, Ohio families are facing an affordability crisis—from the rising cost of eggs to childcare to energy costs—the cost to live, work, and raise a family in Ohio is getting higher and our constituents are crying out for help. The average Ohio family already spends a significant portion of their paycheck on utility bills every month and the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) estimates that the average price of electricity will increase approximately 58–88% in the next several years. House Bill 79 was drafted to address this growing problem and help Ohioans save money on their electric bills by flattening Ohio’s energy demand curve.

As my cosponsor explained, this legislation works by incentivizing Ohio utility companies to create new, completely voluntary energy-saving programs by which they can offer their customers discounts on energy efficiency products & services. Importantly, House Bill 79 requires that any energy efficiency program created under this bill actually save ratepayers money. And we won’t just take their word for it—utility companies will have to prove to the PUCO that the programs are working as intended on a regular basis. Otherwise, they won’t be able to offer energy efficiency programs. And anyone, including consumer protection groups and environmental groups, can contest these programs if they think they aren’t living up to their promise—ensuring the programs are fair, transparent, and accountable to consumers. Consumers will also have multiple opportunities to opt-out if they do not wish to participate as well.

Ohio used to have similar energy efficiency programs that were eliminated several years ago. According to the PUCO, a total savings for consumers of more than \$7 billion statewide over a 10-year period. This bill improves upon these old programs to ensure that the new ones will be more targeted and more effective—which will, in turn, save Ohioans even more money over time.

These programs are designed to save Ohio families money on their utility bills in three important ways:

- (1) First, program participants will directly benefit by receiving discounts on energy efficiency products and lower monthly bills due to lower energy usage.
- (2) Second, all ratepayers, even those who choose not to participate in the programs, will pay lower rates because utility companies will be able to buy less energy at cheaper rates.
- (3) And third, everyone will save more money in the long run because we won’t be overburdening our grid and utilities companies won’t have to spend even more money updating existing infrastructure or building new delivery systems we would otherwise need to carry the additional electricity.

As an added bonus—Ohio’s electrical grid will also be more reliable and resilient because on the hottest days of summer and the coldest days of winter we will be putting less stress on the system to meet customers’ demands for power, helping to prevent power outages.

At the end of the day, the cheapest kilowatt of energy is the one we don’t use. Ohio families are hurting as a result of inflation and rising energy costs. H.B. 79 is one significant, concrete step we can take today to help make Ohioans’ lives just a little bit more affordable. That’s why this bipartisan bill has earned support from both Democratic and Republican lawmakers, as well as support from environmental groups, utility companies, and most major consumer protection groups like the Citizens Utility Board of Ohio.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify; we would be happy to answer any questions at this time.