



OEC [Action Fund]

Proponent Testimony
Ohio House Bill 79 (Sweeney/Seitz)
Ohio Senate Energy Public Utilities Committee
December 3rd, 2024

Chair Reineke, Vice Chair McColley, and members of the Ohio Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee, My name is Nolan Rutschilling and I serve as Managing Director of Energy Policy for the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) Action Fund. Our organization protects and enhances the environment and the health of all Ohio communities by advancing critical priorities, holding policymakers accountable, and electing environmental champions. Thank you for allowing me to provide written proponent testimony on Ohio House Bill 79 (HB 79).

My testimony will focus on the differences between the programs created in HB 79 and the past programs offered by utilities. The programs are smaller, voluntary, and contain significant accountability and reporting by the PUCO that all parties will be able to participate in. They also increase the low income components of utilities' plans.

First, the programs are smaller in scale and more focused than in the past. The programs allowed under HB 79 are one quarter the size of previous programs, and focused mainly on residential customers. Industrial and Commercial customers will have the opportunity to opt-in to programs, but will not be paying for the programs otherwise. The programs are also capped in size, and have more restrictions on eligible technologies to ensure effective deployment of funding.

The energy efficiency programs created under HB 79 are voluntary, meaning utilities and customers have the choice to participate. This change will give consumers more opportunity to opt out—with considerations for mail, phone, or internet options. The requirement of two notices by the utility to customers will give consumers the choice on whether or not to participate, and of course any consumer facing entities will have the opportunity to educate consumers throughout this process.

Finally, and most importantly, are the increased accountability measures and reporting required of utilities who offer energy efficiency programs. A utility's energy efficiency portfolio program is required to undergo an annual cost effectiveness and compliance review each year. The utility and the PUCO must conduct these reviews, and parties to the plan will be able to review and participate in the process. HB 79 requires utilities to verify energy savings through new more stringent measures, including ensuring utilities don't take credit for federal programs.

In addition to the annual review, HB 79 requires the PUCO to review each utility's program and submit a report to the General Assembly that compiles overall energy savings achieved. This accountability also extends to the hearing process which will give parties who have raised concerns around the legislation ample opportunity to give feedback on program design as well as reported savings and costs. To put it simply: every party expressing interest or concerns over energy efficiency programs will be able to participate in hearings and influence program design before the programs are created, and will be able to review and give feedback on utility reporting to ensure programs are run cost effectively.

OEC Action Fund supports passage of HB 79. Thank you for allowing me to offer testimony in support of House Bill 79. The OEC Action Fund sees this bill as critically necessary, putting us on a path to grid reliability and energy bill savings. We hope that the success of these programs will be a building block upon which Ohio can expand these critical energy efficiency measures and reduce Ohioans' bills and our energy consumption even further.