

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Tuesday, May 3, 2022

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Coalition Responds to Phase 1 of Focus on Energy Review

Speakers Elevate Concerns about Energy Burden in Milwaukee

Milwaukee, WI – Today, several environmental justice organizations held a [virtual press conference](#) in response to the Public Service Commission (PSC) review of the state's energy efficiency program, Focus on Energy.

“Focus on Energy has had great successes, especially for business owners looking to reduce their energy bill by making energy efficiency improvements. Unfortunately, the program has not always met the needs of low income customers and communities with high energy burdens,” said **Cassie Steiner, Sierra Club - Wisconsin Chapter Campaign Coordinator**. “We are excited to see the Public Service Commissioners prioritizing improvements to this program that will expand its reach to Wisconsinites who most need it.”

Phase 1 of the Quadrennial (every four years) review of Focus on Energy focused on macro-level goals of the program. Low income programming was one of the several categories assessed by the PSC in this phase of the review process. In Phase 1, Commissioners Valcq and Heubner supported a pilot program that would address [high energy burden areas](#). Today's press event also included a demonstration of Sierra Club's newly released [Energy Burden Calculator](#).

Groundwork Milwaukee Organizing Associated Keviea Guiden shared why she engaged in the first phase of the Focus on Energy review process. “Energy Burden is disproportionately high in Black and Latinx neighborhoods in Milwaukee. I have a moral obligation to help bring about *change* to our underserved communities, and I hope that the Public Service Commission feels that obligation too.”

Advocates shared specific suggestions for the energy burden pilot program, as the Focus on Energy review process moves into Phase 2 later this month.

“Nationally, we are seeing historic infrastructure investments through the bipartisan infrastructure bill. This increased funding for energy efficiency upgrades is crucial. Beyond that, we need to see commitment to addressing high energy burdens in Wisconsin, especially in Milwaukee,” said **Richard Diaz, the Midwest Regional Field Organizer with Blue Green Alliance**. “The Focus on Energy program is uniquely positioned to provide much needed energy efficiency upgrades - including new appliances, better insulation and more. For people in my community who live in older homes that are drafty, unsafe and uncomfortable, these improvements not only decrease electric bills, but also improve quality of life.”

“There have been numerous times where energy efficiency upgrades have been put on hold due to health and safety hazards in a home, such as asbestos or carbon monoxide. The energy burden pilot program must include funding to address those hazards so that those unable to afford those repairs can access these energy upgrades, and so that our energy efficiency professionals have a safe working environment,” added **Kevin Kane, Chief Economist with Green Homeowners United, a Focus on Energy Trade Ally providing insulation, air sealing and HVAC services.**

“I’m excited to see how this new quadrennial review accelerates Wisconsin’s transition to a renewable energy future. Making Focus on Energy programs effective, accessible, and affordable for homes with high energy burden will have the biggest impact on Wisconsinites’ well-being,” said **Sierra Club and Wisconsin Health Professionals for Climate Action member and physician Victoria Gillet.** “I am hopeful that this time next year I’ll be referring my patients to new energy efficiency incentives that meet their needs and improve their health.”

In addition to the energy burden pilot, the Focus on Energy review also better aligns the program’s goals with utility and government climate and decarbonization goals.

Maithilee Kanthi, Climate Justice Organizer with Clean Wisconsin, said, “I am excited to see these improvements to an already successful energy efficiency program. Energy efficiency is so valuable in that it is a key way to decrease carbon emissions, increase affordability of electric bills, and address socioeconomic disparities. I am eager to continue to engage in the Focus on Energy review process to ensure that these priorities are addressed.”

As the review moves into phase 2, advocates hope to see the energy burden pilot program continue to move forward, as well as the following improvements to Focus on Energy: increased ease of application, better education about the program and funding for trusted community organizations to spread the word about Focus, coverage of health and safety improvements found when energy assessments are conducted, replacement of aging and inefficient appliances, expanded low income programs, and alignment with decarbonization goals.

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