



June 7, 2024

VIA ELECTRONIC FILING

Elizabeth Mahoney
Chairperson, Energy Efficiency Advisory Council
Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources
100 Cambridge Street, #1020
Boston, MA 02114
Email: ma-eeac@mass.gov

Dear Commissioner Mahoney:

On behalf of its nearly 80,000 members and supporters in Massachusetts, the Sierra Club Massachusetts Chapter respectfully submits the following comments in response to the Energy Efficiency Advisory Council's public comment period on the 2025-2027 Three-Year Plan. The Sierra Club thanks the Council for the opportunity to comment. This is an issue that our organization cares deeply about. We are eager to continue working with you to produce an updated plan that supports renters, low and moderate-income, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and immigrant communities being prioritized to receive equitable access to the energy efficiency and electrification incentives in the Mass Save program, in addition to reduced energy burden. We know that the most socially vulnerable communities across the state continue to face barriers to accessing these benefits. Roughly 43 percent of households in the state are paying into the program despite not receiving any benefits, with most of the resources going to more affluent communities and homeowners. The Mass Save program offerings should be accessible to all, especially those who stand to benefit the most from reduced energy costs through efficiency upgrades.

The Commonwealth must intentionally prioritize BIPOC and low- and moderate-income communities for incentives to transition from gas to electric. In doing so, we will make significant progress towards meeting our state's climate goals, which call for a 28 percent reduction in heat-related emissions by next year. However, careful consideration of the needs of these communities is necessary to avoid unintended consequences such as increases in heating costs. As more homes across the state transition off the gas system, we can anticipate that the rates for gas service will increase, and we cannot leave our most vulnerable communities to be the last ones remaining on the system, suffering with even higher energy bills. This requires a thoughtful plan centered on equity that includes bold targets to reach and assist these communities with heat pump adoption and energy affordability. It also requires improving language access, streamlining the rebate process,



and robust data collection to ensure we're equitably providing energy efficiency investments and lowering energy burdens in communities that need it most.

We want to ensure that progress continues in translating program outreach material into different languages and that the customer-preferred language is documented at each interaction. We also want to ensure that Mass Save program contractors continue to prioritize the hiring of multilingual staff.

We are aware of inconsistencies in the income qualification process for the no-cost energy efficiency services through Mass Save. Some residents qualify for low-income programming because they are on R2 - the discounted Eversource rate. However, not all residents who qualify for R2 through the utilities also qualify for the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) through their local CAP agency. The qualification process must be simplified and streamlined. In addition, we have heard from customers who have experienced significant waiting periods before receiving their rebates, exacerbating program affordability issues. As part of an equity agenda, this needs to be improved as low and moderate-income customers cannot wait to recover what they spend on energy upgrades.

The Sierra Club has initiated an energy burden narrative project in which we have been speaking with residents of Massachusetts to listen and record their experiences with energy burden. We have posted some of these stories to our website as blog posts, and we will be continuing to post more over the next few months.

Please read our first seven stories (links here and full text in appendix):

- ["Chasing Warmth: The Burden of Energy Costs"](#)
- ["The Discount Rate is Not Enough on Social Security"](#)
- ["The State Needs to Push Back on the Utility Rate Increases"](#)
- ["The Challenge of Warming a Home with Fuel Oil"](#)
- ["Los programas de ahorro energético no llegan a las comunidades aisladas en inglés como la nuestra"](#)
- ["Surviving the Summer Heat in Boston"](#)
- ["It Takes a Village to Heat a Home with Wood"](#)

These stories articulate our conversations with residents from across the Commonwealth who are desperately struggling with energy burden. We look forward to having the opportunity to continue sharing these stories with the Council, in addition to other state-level decision-makers, and the public.

Below is a summary of the high-level takeaways from these conversations:

- People think about energy burden daily and are struggling to pay their utility bills.
- People are having conversations about their energy bills with friends, family, and neighbors.
- Receiving energy bills in the mail has become a stress-inducing experience.
- Ratepayers are trying every strategy they can think of to lower their bills (keeping lights off, keeping the heat as low as possible, gathering in one room with a space heater, only using lower energy kitchen appliances, changing all their lightbulbs to LEDs, looking into Mass Save offerings, etc.)
- Utilities profits are too high. Utilities should be carefully scrutinized and held accountable.
- Immigrant and non-English speaking communities particularly struggle to access utility and state programs for energy efficiency, fuel assistance, and discount rates.
- People want more transparency around electricity rates.
- Mass Save is not responding to people efficiently, and people are struggling to get the rebates they were promised.
- Moderate-income people are suffering, too.
- In order for Massachusetts to fully electrify as a solution to climate change, we must address the cost of electricity through rate reform.

To meet the urgency of the climate crisis, the upcoming Mass Save 2025-2027 three-year plan must evolve from a primary focus on energy efficiency to achieving equitable building decarbonization at scale. This transformation, already underway, will require significant changes to Mass Save programs, as well as legislative and regulatory shifts.

The Department of Public Utilities should incorporate the Energy Efficiency Advisory Council's Equity Working Group recommendations into the 2025-2027 Joint Statewide Three-Year Electric and Gas Energy Efficiency Investment Plan. The recommendations lay a roadmap for building on the equity reforms included in the 2020 plan and include critical new steps needed to address urgent energy burdens facing low-income and moderate-income residents and business owners, particularly in BIPOC communities. In addition to previous points, these recommendations include: expanding the eligible population for the no cost program; streamlining the income qualification process and instant rebates; empowering the community first partnership; reviewing the environmental justice municipalities criteria as set by the DPU to create a list of EJMs for participation during the 2025-2027 three-year plan; and measuring success.

Adopting these recommendations means households and businesses in communities grappling with unpredictable, fossil-fueled rising energy costs can afford to take advantage of Mass Save incentive offerings and switch to electrification. The ability to access solutions to lower energy bills should be for more than just the affluent and



well-resourced communities. Centering equity in this next three-year plan and making intentional investments in communities that need it the most will help Massachusetts meet its ambitious — and achievable — climate goals.

Sierra Club looks forward to continuing to work with the Energy Efficiency Advisory Council to achieve clean and affordable energy for all Massachusetts residents.

Respectfully submitted,

Jess Nahigian
State Political Director
Sierra Club Massachusetts

Appendices

*Please note that all stories can be found at

<https://www.sierraclub.org/massachusetts/energy-burden>

Appendix A)

Chasing Warmth: The Burden of Energy Costs

This is the story of a family of four living in Gloucester. They recently moved into a new home and have been grappling with the extreme cost of energy.

We bought a home last December and moved in in January. It's a new house for us, but the house itself is old, built in 1853. My husband and I love old homes. We bought this house because it is old and historical. It has great features, architecture, and character. It is big and has a green yard – the features we wanted in our new home because our previous house was too small and only had a driveway. We also appreciate the quality of life that came with this house since it's walking distance to downtown and has all the conveniences of city living.

With the new house, we knew we'd have a higher mortgage, but we never could have prepared ourselves for the cost of energy in our new home. We would consider ourselves middle income, both my husband and I work. However, **our energy bills were costing us \$1300-1400 per month after we moved in January 2023**, and quickly became one of the largest expenses in our new budget. Heating oil was \$950 a month, while electricity was between \$400 and \$450 a month. Our new home has pretty high ceilings, so the amount of heating we need is probably more than average homes. Still, we did not expect that we would pay so much for energy despite all our efforts to conserve energy.

With such high, unexpected energy costs, last winter was difficult. **We survived the winter by paying a ton, just to keep the bare minimum of heating.** At night, we kept the thermostat to 59°F. During the day we brought it up only to around 66°F. But then the cold snap happened in early February, and during that time, 66°F didn't feel like enough. To keep our family warm at night we used a space heater. **Each day, our family of four would huddle in one room of the house, gathered around the space heater.** We even ate meals from this room, as it was too cold to linger beyond for long. The kitchen, which is normally thought of as the heart of the home, quickly became one of the most uncomfortable places to be in our house. We would go into the kitchen to prepare food, but bring it back around the space heater to eat.



One day my 7-year-old daughter asked: *if we're going to be cold like this, why did we move?*

In the winter, we're in a constant battle chasing warmth, and we're already wondering how we will manage it this year. I don't have a problem bundling up, but we are budgeting now for a worse case scenario. We have some savings, but we also have to plan for other things happening in the house. I get worried every time I get a bill from National Grid. What is it going to be next month? Will we have a cold snap again this year?

Energy has literally become a burden for us just to live.

We had a contractor from Mass Save come and do a home energy audit last year. We were eligible for a Mass Save rebate, and we were supposed to get \$2,000 back in July of 2023, however, I am still having trouble getting my rebate. It's been next to impossible to get a hold of someone from Mass Save. Utility-run programs like Mass Save are obviously not running efficiently, and I am not the only one who is waiting for a rebate. Why does it have to take public action for Mass Save to respond how they should in the first place? Then what do I do?

What comes after this? Do the utilities pay any consequences for the pain they inflict on ratepayers? It is a form of cruelty for a for-profit utility to jack up rates to 65% more this past winter, causing financial stress and burden for so many residents. It is a jolt to the system for the customer to see such high rates. Many people in our communities are struggling to come up with the money to pay their energy bills. **The utility companies should not be allowed to punish those who cannot afford to pay the bills by shutting off their heating and electricity.**

Having a warm home and the lights on are basic human rights.

For now **I'm cold, and surrounded by cold.** It puts me and my family in a state of distress.

I wasn't thinking about the cost of energy in our new home search. A lot of people in my community live on a fixed income with food assistance or rental assistance, and I can't imagine what it's like for them.

Massachusetts should not push for electrification of everything to reduce CO2 emissions and help mitigate climate change without first addressing the energy burden crisis. **In order for Massachusetts to fully electrify as a solution to climate change, the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) must address the cost of electricity.** As of now, I



can't afford to electrify everything and I cannot pay the exorbitant electricity rates. It is simple math.

It's very utopian to use the word kindness in this situation, but that is what I wish to see from these utility companies.

Appendix B)

The Discount Rate is Not Enough On Social Security

This story is shared by an artist in his 60s in Waltham, MA.

In December of 2020, I was lucky to get a low-income unit in a luxury apartment building. I consider this my forever home. I've moved around a lot and needed a home that would accommodate a power chair. I feel very lucky to have this space, knowing how difficult it is to get off of the waitlist for apartments like mine.

My building is heated with gas and during the winter I get fuel assistance from the state which is able to cover this bill. The biggest energy expense that I have is my electric bill. While I receive a discount rate on my electricity, this is still one of my largest expenses. I've been analyzing my electric bill and making changes to my electric use to try to get my bill down. My dryer and oven really run the bill up. At night I only leave one light on. During the day I rely on the windows as my source of light. I've heard that a toaster oven is much cheaper to run than a traditional oven so I've tried cooking as much food as possible in the toaster oven and microwave instead. I rely on cooking most of my own food, especially because of some food allergies that I have, but I can't afford the expense of using the oven every day.

Sometimes I'm afraid to open the mail to check my energy bill. Just the thought of that gives me anxiety.

Small changes in the cost of electricity have a huge impact on me. I have an ADA companion, a cat, who was recently diagnosed with asthma, and I need to be able to pay for his medication.

For those of us living on social security, like myself, we need a more significant discount on our electric bills. **The state should lower the energy rates even more if your only source of income is less than \$15,000 of social security a year.**



The discount rate I receive on my electric bill is very important. **Without the discount rate, my electric bill would be like 15-20% of my income - that's outrageous!** I'm very grateful to have access to the discount rate. But for those of us on social security, it's not enough.

As for the summer, I'd love to see more trees in my community and around my apartment to help naturally cool the area and cut back on air conditioning costs. More trees and flowers in the neighborhood would really help prevent extreme heat. I'd especially like to see more sunflowers and I'm helping to plant them around town. I hope the next time you visit the community of Waltham, you're greeted by sunflowers when you step off the train.

Appendix C)

The State Needs to Push Back on the Utility Rate Increases

Retired Professor Living in an Apartment in Worcester, Massachusetts.

I live in a one-bedroom apartment in Worcester. I moved into this apartment in 2021. The building is a renovated school building with very tall windows.

The gas-based HVAC system in this building is about 20 years old and not very efficient. The heat is *technically* included in the rent, however, my rent was raised 10% at the end of my first year. And now another 8% for this year. I believe these costs are partially reflecting the increased cost of heating. This kind of steep increase doesn't match up with my increase in social security. **When National Grid announced that they were raising their rates across MA, I knew my rent was also going to increase.**

When I first moved in 2 and a half years ago my electric bills were about \$90 per month, however, the prices have very quickly gone up significantly. I pay for my air conditioning through my electric bill. **In the last two years, my electric bill nearly doubled.** I decided to enroll in the utilities "budget plan." On this plan, my electric bill comes to around \$160 per month, almost double what I was paying when I moved in. For those who are unfamiliar, the budget plan is an average that the utilities calculate based on a year's worth of your bill. Every 6 months they adjust it if they find that they are not getting as much as they want. My first budget plan was \$125, then it went up to \$160. The utility sent me information about the budget plan and at first I thought it would be a better option for me, but this constant adjustment of it is not great.



I have a lot of strategies that I use to keep my bill as low as possible. I've added draft snakes below all of my windows and my front door to make sure I'm not losing heat or cool air in the summer. I clean the vents to my blower system every month to try to keep the system as efficient as possible. I made sure that all of my light bulbs are LED - that really makes a difference in the bill. I also confirmed with the building that all of the recessed lighting in my apartment was LED.

I hear my father's voice every time I step out the door. "Have you turned off all the damn lights?" My dad was very conscious of energy use.

I've been a member of the Sierra Club for 40 years and so I've always cared about these issues. One thing I could be better about is unplugging things. If I leave for a trip I make sure that I turn off and unplug all sorts of things like the TV, printer, etc. With a house full of electronics, the energy really starts to add up if you're not unplugging everything.

I talk about the cost of energy with my friends and other folks at the senior center. This is something many people in my community are regularly thinking about.

I'm retired but when my rent went up I started teaching part time to keep up with the bills. I have a small pension from teaching.

I think the most important thing is the rate setting. It's a murky bureaucratic process, that the average citizen has no idea how it happens or what to do with it. All we do is get the letter saying that our rate went up. The state needs to push back on the utilities and the rate increases. When you see the salaries and profits of the top executives, it really makes you think about where our money is going. I see examples where energy is owned by the town, or citizens, or local utilities and the rates are different and there is more transparency about what energy they're buying. When I lived in Seattle I was constantly getting notifications about sources of energy. **What I'm asking for is more transparency around our rates. We deserve that information.**

Appendix D)

The Challenge of Warming a Home with Fuel Oil

This story is shared by a young couple renting in Medford, Massachusetts.



We've lived in our apartment in Medford for about 4 years. This apartment has fuel oil for hot water and heating. We also use an electric heater to try to reduce the cost of heating in the winter. Our home is older and quite drafty.

Our National Grid bill is under my partner's name. **As an immigrant I was afraid to have bills under my name. I'd prefer to avoid interactions with service providers if I can manage it. This is a shared fear amongst immigrants.**

When we first moved into the apartment they advertised the space as having low energy bills. And luckily, the apartment naturally stays quite cool during the summer. We were told that oil was about \$2 per gallon, totaling about \$300 for the winter at most. But this was during a winter when oil/gas prices were very low. Since then heating oil has gotten very expensive (especially during the Russia-Ukraine war.) Last year we paid over \$5 a gallon.

Heating became a major expense in our budget. We were **spending \$100 per week on heating; between \$350 and \$400 a month.** I had a conversation with our landlord about getting heat pumps but she said it was too expensive.

We learned from our landlord that there is a website where you can get a price match on the heating oil but you have to get at least 100-150 gallons of oil, which means we have to spend about \$330 upfront and some of the retailers only accept cash. **So we have to think strategically about when to purchase the heating oil. We space out our purchases based on other household expenses like medical bills, credit card payments, etc. It's a constant concern of ours thinking about whose card we will use to pay for it and when we will make the payment.**

Thankfully, this winter season (2023/2024) has been relatively mild. As a result we've spent less money on heating oil this year.

Last winter, we talked a lot about heating oil with other young people in a similar situation. Some of these people live with roommates, which makes it a bit easier to divide the cost up. It's trickier when it's one family. We've considered moving to a new apartment but many of the other places that we've looked at in the area also have heating oil. We definitely don't want to be in this same situation in another apartment.

We were able to get free insulation through Mass Save because our landlord lives in the same building as us. They also changed our windows to reduce noise and lower the energy bills. **However, there's only a one year protection to not raise rents after weatherization**



updates. This coming lease renewal, our landlord could raise the rent and we're starting to worry about this. There needs to be more protections for renters so landlords can't raise rents if they benefit from the incentives to weatherize the home.

Because I'm not a U.S. citizen, I'm not able to benefit from state energy programs like fuel assistance and the discount rate. I pay into them but don't benefit.

In terms of switching to heat pumps - we need a better system to make this more accessible to everyone. Currently, it's all rebates so you have to make a downpayment of thousands of dollars. The idea of having to spend this much upfront means this is not an option for many people. **I've also been noticing that every retailer has a very different range of prices for heat pumps and the state isn't doing much to put price caps on these appliances.**

One final suggestion based on my observations - it seems like there has been a boom in advertising for Mass Save programs - like on MBTA, billboards and Youtube. But these ads don't talk about what the benefits look like for renters or low-mid income households. These ads are also not reaching language isolated households. I'd love to see workshops run with interpretation services and hosted in language isolated communities.

Appendix E)

Los programas de ahorro energético no llegan a las comunidades aisladas en inglés como la nuestra // Energy Savings Programs Aren't Reaching English Isolated Communities like Ours

Esta historia la comparte una pareja hispana que vive en East Boston y hablan poco inglés. East Boston es una comunidad mayoritariamente de inmigrantes latinos. // This story is shared by a limited-English speaking couple living in East Boston. East Boston is a majority Latinx immigrant community.

This story is in partnership with GreenRoots. GreenRoots is a resident-led, grassroots, community-based organization with 30 years of experience in achieving significant environmental justice accomplishments and public health victories in Chelsea, East Boston, and the Greater Boston region.

(English Translation Below Spanish)

Somos pequeños propietarios de una casa en East Boston. Hay 3 unidades en nuestra casa y vivimos en una de ellas. Tenemos gas para la calefacción y el agua caliente.

Los precios de la energía han subido mucho. En este momento estamos pagando \$300 - \$400 al mes en gas y \$200 - \$300 por electricidad en nuestra unidad. Hemos comparado



nuestras facturas de energía con las de nuestros inquilinos y nuestras facturas parecen ser bastante similares.

Hemos tenido dificultades para pagar nuestras facturas de energía a tiempo. Hemos intentado poner en práctica estrategias para mantener nuestras facturas lo más bajas posible. **Siempre que podemos, intentamos no consumir energía. Apagamos las luces. Utilizamos la menor calefacción posible. Pero seguimos teniendo dificultades para hacer frente a los pagos mensuales.**

La carga energética es algo en lo que pensamos mucho, ya que las facturas siguen aumentando y los precios siguen subiendo. Cada vez nos resulta más difícil.

Hablamos de este tema con nuestros amigos y vecinos. Les preguntamos: "¿Has visto la última factura de la luz? ¿Has visto lo alta que es?"

Es muy habitual que la gente hable de este tema, sobre todo porque la carga que soporta nuestra comunidad es cada vez mayor.

También hemos hablado de este tema con nuestros inquilinos. Algunos nos han dicho que no encienden la calefacción para ahorrar dinero. Una vez los precios eran tan altos que algunos de nuestros inquilinos nos pidieron que comprobáramos si había una fuga de gas responsable por las elevadas facturas. Un inquilino nos pidió ayuda para pagar la factura de la luz porque era demasiado cara y tenía hijos.

Hemos oído hablar de varios programas de asistencia energética disponibles a través del Estado o de la compañía eléctrica, pero no sabemos nada sobre cómo acceder a estos recursos. Creemos que nuestros inquilinos tampoco. El inglés no es nuestra lengua materna y queremos que el Estado y las empresas de servicios públicos apoyen los servicios de traducción para que más gente pueda acceder a estos recursos. Tuvimos que recurrir a un intérprete para compartir nuestra historia.

Nos alegra tener la oportunidad de hablar de nuestra experiencia con la carga energética. Creemos que es importante que el Estado y las empresas de servicios públicos conozcan estas experiencias de personas que luchan contra los altos costes de la energía. **Sería estupendo que hubiera algún tipo de regulador de precios para evitar estas subidas de precios que no paran de subir. También sería beneficioso contar con más participación de la comunidad para que todos podamos aprender más sobre cómo los consumidores pueden beneficiarse de precios más bajos y de cualquier programa que pueda estar disponible para nosotros.**

We're small landlords who own a house in East Boston. There are 3 units in our house and we live in one of them. We have gas for heating and hot water.



Our energy prices have definitely been going up. Right now we're paying \$300 - \$400 a month in gas and \$200 - \$300 for electricity in our unit. We've compared our energy bills with our tenants and our bills seem to be quite similar.

We've had difficulties paying our energy bills on time. We've tried to implement strategies to keep our bills as low as possible. **Whenever possible we try not to use energy. We turn off our lights. We use as little heat as possible. But we're still having difficulties making the monthly payments.**

Energy burden is something we think about a lot as bills continue to get bigger and the prices continue to increase. It's getting more and more difficult for us.

We talk with our friends and neighbors about this issue. We ask: "Have you seen the recent electric bill? Have you seen how high it is?"

It's really common for folks to speak about this issue especially as the burden on our community has become so large.

We've also talked with our tenants about this issue. We learned from some of them that they don't really turn on the heat, in order to conserve costs. The prices were so high at one point that some of our tenants asked us to check to see if there was a gas leak that was responsible for the high bills. One renter asked for help with an electric bill because it was simply too much to pay and they have kids.

We've heard about various energy assistance programs available through either the state or the utility, but we don't know anything about how to access these resources. We don't think our tenants do either. English isn't our first language and we want to see the state and utilities support translation services so that more people are able to access these resources. We needed to use an interpreter to share our story.

We're glad to have the opportunity to talk about our experience with energy burden. We think it's important that the state and utilities are hearing about these experiences of people struggling with high energy costs. **It would be great if there was some type of price regulator out there to avoid these price increases that are going up and up all the time. It would also be beneficial to have more community engagement so we can all learn more about how consumers can benefit from lower prices and any programs that might be available to us.**

Appendix F)

Surviving the Summer Heat in Boston

This story comes from a woman renting an apartment in Dorchester.



I live on the 2nd floor of a triple decker in Dorchester, a neighborhood in Boston. I've been here for about 8 and half years. **My space has a dozen windows and because of all of the light it's blazing hot in the summer.** In order to try and keep my home cool, I have 4 fans and 2 air conditioning window units. I try to be really strategic about when I use the fans and the ACs to keep the bill as low as possible. I only use the fans and AC when I need to. The electric bill would be very high if I ran these units all of the time.

During the summer I spend a lot of time at the library or walking around the mall to access the free AC. I keep all of my blinds down during the summer to try to keep the space a little cooler. I'll open the window at night for some fresh air if the temperature has gone down. My window units are quite difficult to manage. They don't fit the windows perfectly so I have to work to secure them and carefully move them in and out of the windows. I worry that they might fall out one day. I've actually hurt my back trying to get them in and out of the windows. Generally, I'll use them during the day and then take them out at night if it's cool enough to get a breeze while I sleep. The past 2 years have been the hottest on record for the planet. **Twenty years ago I didn't even own an AC - I just had a fan. You can't live here without AC anymore.**

I have a gas stove/oven in my kitchen that I don't use at all in the summer because it makes the apartment too hot. I've also learned how detrimental a gas stove can be to my health so when I cook with the stove (in the cooler months) I make sure to always keep the window open.

In the winter I have a space heater that I use to try to keep my heating bill lower. My apartment is quite large and there's only one thermostat, so if I turn on the heat I'm heating the whole apartment. If I'm just using one room of the apartment it's wasteful to turn the heat on. As a result, **I generally don't turn the heat on. It's too expensive. I had to turn the heat on once this year just to make sure the pipes didn't freeze.**

The pandemic has really increased the amount of money I've had to spend on energy. Before the pandemic my bills were really low; I was at work in an office and then at the gym or attending events. Once everything transitioned to remote work I really noticed the impact on my energy bills.

I always pay my utility bills on time but it's a challenge. Every once in a while after I pay my bill I think: "I guess I'm going to eat rice and beans for a week."

I unplug everything in my apartment. Even if I use it every day. I also make sure to turn the power strip off in the evening when I am asleep.

I would really like to see the state and utilities better manage wasteful energy use. I see so many outdoor restaurant venues heating outside spaces in the winter and think about how wasteful that is. There are also apartment buildings where the tenants don't have the ability to regulate their own heat and it gets so hot in the winter that they need to open



the windows. We must be as smart as possible about how we're using our energy.

Appendix G)

It Takes a Village to Heat a Home with Wood

This story is shared by a son who helps his parents manage their energy needs in Western Massachusetts.

My parents live in a 1,000 square foot house in Hawley, Massachusetts. The house was originally built as a hunting camp in the early 1900s. I don't think it was ever intended to be a permanent home. The house itself is not particularly well insulated. They have electric baseboard heating and a wood stove. **My parents used to rely on electric heat but as the years have gone by and the price of electricity has gone up, they've shifted to primarily heating their home with the wood stove.** Both of my parents are retired due to health issues and they are living on a fixed income.

I live in the Boston area and I make the 2 hour drive to Hawley about every other weekend during the winter months to help chop the wood. Other family members also pitch in to help.

Last winter, due to a medical emergency, my parents had to rely more on the electric heating because we couldn't prepare the wood. They are still working to pay off that electric bill. They think about the energy bills on a day to day basis, and are focused on what can save them the most money and make their lives easier.

With the wood stove my parents wake up during the middle of the night and in the early morning to check to make sure the wood stove hasn't gone out. I worry about them going down slippery stairs in winter to bring the wood in. **It has taken a village to keep the house warm. If electricity didn't cost so much, it wouldn't have to be this way.**

We looked into the state's Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) but my parents were just above the Area Median Income (AMI) cut off so they were not eligible. People who are just above the AMI requirement end up getting screwed. The state needs to dedicate more funding to programs like this that assist low and moderate income homeowners with their energy bills.

My parents haven't had a Mass Save assessment done on their house yet. We tried to set that up but then my father had a stroke and it was challenging to navigate this system amongst all the medical appointments. It will have to be me who makes the appointment for them. With some of the recommendations they'll likely get from Mass Save - **it's tough because poor people can't afford to put thousands of dollars towards something and wait for a rebate at the end of the year. You can't wait to pay for food.** It seems like because of this only wealthier people are getting access to these energy efficiency upgrades.



It seems to me like we need a subsidy program or cost control on electric rates to make them competitive with fossil fuel heating alternatives. **We need to make electric heating more affordable than liquified natural gas or propane.** Electric heating also needs to be competitive with biomass, like the wood pellet stoves that folks in Western Mass use.