

# **Comments on: New Jersey Board of Public Utilities Third Triennium of Energy Efficiency and Peak Demand Reduction Programs**

**Submitted by the New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance to the  
New Jersey Board of Public Utilities**

July 29, 2025

## ***Introduction***

The New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance (NJEJA) respectfully submits our comments to the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (BPU) in the matter of the Implementation of P.L. 2018, c. 17, the New Jersey Clean Energy Act of 2018, Regarding the Third Triennium of Energy Efficiency and Peak Demand Reduction Programs, Docket No. QO24020126.

## ***The New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance***

The New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance (NJEJA) is a statewide organization mobilizing other organizations and individuals in order to increase the quality of life and upward mobility opportunities for communities that experience additional burdens resulting from histories of systemic injustice. Our work covers a wide range of areas, and we believe that the community's vision of improvement will always be the most effective and an important part of strategic development.

Therefore, as part of our ongoing work to support communities most impacted by disproportionate pollution burdens - including those who lack access to participation in energy

efficiency and building decarbonization programs - we submit these comments today in an effort to assist the BPU in their effort:

“To ensure that safe, adequate, and proper utility services are provided at reasonable, non-discriminatory rates to all members of the public who desire such services. To develop and regulate a competitive, economically cost-effective energy policy that promotes responsible growth and clean renewable energy sources while maintaining a high quality of life in New Jersey.”<sup>1</sup>

Our range of work, state-wide and national reach, and diversity of membership give us a unique perspective on environmental protection and allow us to bring the concerns of historically overburdened communities to the forefront of the conversation. We welcome continued conversation on this matter.

### ***A One-Stop Shop***

#### ***Implementation***

The New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance fully supports the concept and implementation of a one-stop shop as a single online destination for energy customers. Such online infrastructure is a critical component for equitable distribution of information related to educating customers as well as providing comprehensive information and support for EE programs and their necessary registration steps. To this end, we believe that it is critical that the BPU considers all facets related to equity in access prior to launch in order to ensure that updates and maintenance to the one-stop shop are beneficial and positive adjustments as opposed to retroactive fixes.

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<sup>1</sup> New Jersey Board of Public Utilities. *Mission Statement*. Board of Public Utilities.  
<https://www.nj.gov/bpu/about/mission/>.

## Ease of Access:

### *Language Barriers*

Of New Jersey's over 8.8 million residents, nearly 2 million residents identify as immigrants and/or refugees. These communities contribute greatly to the vibrancy and diversity of our communities. Language access needs vary across the state as diasporic communities have different levels of English proficiency.<sup>2</sup> As a result, it is imperative that the BPU builds a one-stop shop that is accessible to residents of varying languages and considers how language may be a barrier to participating in the BPU's Energy Efficiency programs. To this end, NJEJA recommends that the Board develop a language justice framework<sup>3 4</sup> for their practices, programs, and community outreach efforts. Such a framework will ensure that all BPU activity as well as partnerships and programs with local entities and other state agencies reach as many residents as possible regardless of their English language proficiency. Furthermore, we recommend that the BPU engage with community-based organizations who likely already have translation services and bilingual/multilingual staff who are prepared to support in education, outreach, and program enrollment. Likewise, any and all community-engagement conducted as part of the one-stop shop development should include translation services for non-English speakers so that comments and feedback can be received and no one is blocked from participating. These efforts will set up a system of inclusion and access which ensures that the state remains on track to meet efficiency goals while welcoming in new customers who previously may have been excluded from the process due to language barriers.

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<sup>2</sup> New American Economy. *New Jersey Language and Demographic Data Report*. December 2020. 2018 American Community Survey, New American Economy.  
[https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/12/NJ\\_Language-and-Demographic-Report\\_Dec-2020.pdf](https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/12/NJ_Language-and-Demographic-Report_Dec-2020.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> A language justice framework seeks to ensure that all members of the community, regardless of shared language or English proficiency, can actively participate in conversation, community development, and shared space thus allowing for authentic and genuine engagement in one's preferred language. Antena.

<sup>4</sup> Antena. *How to build language justice*. 2013.  
[https://antenaantena.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/langjust\\_eng.pdf](https://antenaantena.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/langjust_eng.pdf)

## *Accessibility*

Akin to our thoughts on language justice, we strongly encourage the BPU to consider accessibility for individuals with disabilities, those without steady access to the internet, and those who may use this one-stop shop program via public computers, phones, and other non-laptop devices.

To this point, we raise the question of the digital divide which highlights disparities in access to the internet and a computer.<sup>5</sup> In today's modern era, a lack of access to the internet can be a significant hindrance in accessing information, economic opportunity, and general welfare. Research from Rutgers University New Jersey State Policy Lab in 2023 found that, "approximately 14% of Black and 13% Hispanic population in households in New Jersey do not have access to the internet and a computer, compared to 9% of White households."<sup>6</sup> As such, although it is not incumbent on the NJBPU to fix the digital divide in the state, such disparities should be taken into consideration when developing a one-stop shop. To this end, we recommend collaboration with community organizations - including funding for education and direct services - to conduct community outreach, engagement, and program enrollment support. Additionally, we urge the BPU to ensure that this one-stop shop is just as efficient and effective on mobile devices and tablets as it is on a laptop in order to ensure that families whose only means of access to their internet is through their cellphones are still able to robustly participate in energy efficiency programming.

Additionally, we strongly encourage the BPU to consider accessibility within their web development for people with disabilities including those who use assistive programs such as screen readers when using the internet. The New Jersey Department of Health says

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<sup>5</sup> Merriam-Website. *Digital Divide*. Merriam-Webster, Incorporated.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/digital%20divide>

<sup>6</sup> Rutgers University New Jersey State Policy Lab. *Digital Divide in New Jersey*. 6 April 2023. Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. <https://policylab.rutgers.edu/publication/digital-divide-in-new-jersey/>

that approximately one-tenth of the state’s residents identify as having one more disability. Therefore, the BPU should make any and all efforts to ensure that their one-stop shop is compatible with most major assistive technologies. This is particularly important when considering the intersection of disability and poverty. Energy efficiency programming can be an aid for individuals as EE programs often yield economic benefits and cost reductions. To this end, as there is often a correlation between disability status and economic need,<sup>7</sup> the BPU ensures that a one-stop shop is accessible for all persons will have co-benefits in supporting low-income households and those with economic need.

### *Education and Awareness*

From our experience sharing information with communities about BPU Energy Efficiency programming, the most visible barrier to enrollment is a lack of understanding about opportunities. To be clear, we do not place this responsibility on the resident to understand what programs are available to them. In many cases, residents and customers are inundated with information about opportunities, programs, and eligibility.

To support enrollment, we encourage the BPU to consider adopting an “opt-out” style of enrollment as opposed to “opt-in” wherever possible. In other words, so long as the program will not add cost to a resident, we encourage the BPU to automatically enroll customers in programs which increase their energy efficiency and offer options to opt-out as desired. This holds the potential to increase participation in programs.

Additionally, we strongly encourage educational materials and informational campaigns to be co-developed with community organizations who can highlight the ways in which the educational language can be made more accessible. In many instances, residents feel confused by the language and overwhelmed by trying to translate and decipher the nuances of the program offerings. Collaboration with community-based organizations who have experience in coming

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<sup>7</sup> New Jersey State Health Department Data. *Disability Status*. 2023. State of New Jersey. [https://www-doh.nj.gov/doh-shad/indicator/summary/Dem\\_Disability.html](https://www-doh.nj.gov/doh-shad/indicator/summary/Dem_Disability.html)

alongside residents will increase engagement with the materials and support the BPU’s enrollment goals.

### *Eligibility and Enrollment*

Finally, we encourage the BPU to scrutinize eligibility requirements such that the BPU is able to identify where thresholds may be too restrictive or paperwork requirements too cumbersome. As rates continue to go up this support, and the cost of living is increasingly higher, it is imperative that the state evaluate how they might expand eligibility and support systems.

To this point, as we have stated in previous comments regarding the Energy Master Plan,

“We also encourage the state to consider eligibility requirements other than income. Income verification captures only one aspect of household stability and cannot make holistic determinations about a particular household’s financial needs.”<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, we support self-attestation and encourage the state to continue this verification option. This is particularly important for individuals who do not work traditional M-F, 9-5 careers. For instance, low-income households may supplement their income with gig employment, putting together their monthly finances through jobs that don’t receive a standard paycheck or W-2. In this case, providing documentation for income is challenging and could be a barrier to participation.

In all, if the BPU seeks to increase access and enrollment, removing barriers to enrollment through eligibility review, paperwork requirements, and threshold lowering may prove to be a significant bolster in achieving these goals.

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<sup>8</sup> Helmick, Brooke. “Comments on the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities Energy Master Plan 2024.” 1 May 2025. New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance. <https://njeja.org/2024-emp-comments/>

## ***Equity In Building Decarbonization***

With regards to building decarbonization, we first offer an examination of language which connects to carbon centrism and “net zero”. In this space, as have articulated in previous comments to the board, we do not support any language relating to “net zero” nor do we agree that any mechanism for emissions calculation should include trading, offsets, or net calculations. This position is in line with our work on Mandatory Emissions Reduction efforts and our Cumulative Impacts framework,<sup>9 10</sup> which can be found in more depth and detail on our website and in previous comments to the board. To this end, we highlight what we wrote in the Energy Master Plan comments on building decarbonization:

“Decreasing emissions from the building sector should include considerations that:

- Establish co-pollutant emissions reduction targets in addition to GHG emissions reduction targets;
- Create funding mechanisms that can lower the cost of heat pumps and pass these savings along to renters; and,
- Develop pathways for home improvement developments that include LMI communities and individuals who may rent or not own their home.”<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, NJEJA has stated in other comments to the NJ BPU that we believe the BPU should invest in the creation of an EJ and equity advisory board on building decarbonization. This board should be responsible for supporting facilitation and support to the state on implementation building decarbonization measures. Furthermore, the advisory board can advise the BPU on investment and support for funding programs for affordable whole-home retrofits which pair energy efficiency and electrification, particularly for LMI households. As has been stated by

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<sup>9</sup> New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance and Center for the Urban Environment of the John S. Watson Institute for Urban Policy and Research at Kean University. *Cumulative Impacts Basic Primer*. November 2023. New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance.

[https://njeja.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Cumulative-Impacts-Basic-Primer\\_English.pdf](https://njeja.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Cumulative-Impacts-Basic-Primer_English.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Sheats, Nicky. *Cumulative Impacts and the Permitting Process*. June 2013.

[https://njeja.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/NJEJA-Statewide-Cumulative-Impacts-Policy\\_2019.pdf](https://njeja.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/NJEJA-Statewide-Cumulative-Impacts-Policy_2019.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Helmick, Brooke. “Comments on the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities Energy Master Plan 2024.” 1 May 2025. New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance. <https://njeja.org/2024-emp-comments/>.

other stakeholders, these programs address health, safety, structural upgrades, and weatherization - all of which are critical components for New Jersey's EE and building future.

In line with this, we recommend that the BPU explore the development of new partnerships with community based organizations as well as a bolstering of existing partnerships.

Community-based organizations operate in a critical space, being able to reach communities and residents in a way that bureaucratic agencies are not able to do so effectively. Therefore, the BPU should collaborate and fund community-based organizations to support in facilitating, educating, informing, and providing technical assistance to residents and communities. This will have a widespread positive impact, not only for the community-based organizations operation, but to also build trust between stakeholders, residents, and BPU as well as increase participation in key BPU programs.

Likewise, the BPU must scrutinize all possible pathways to include provisions which protect renters from being excluded from efficiency benefits. In other words, split incentive instances must be mitigated to the greatest extent possible. To this end, community-based organizations, tenant organizations, and other stakeholders in the tenant protection realm will be able to provide insight to the BPU which can inform pathways forward. This will ensure that there is not underinvestment in critical energy-saving measures while also shielding renters from undue cost burdens without receiving demonstrable benefits.

## ***Conclusion***

These comments have been submitted in an effort to share with the NJ Board of Public Utilities, our understanding, expertise, and lessons learned regarding best practices. As a result of our over 20 years of experience in energy work, emissions reduction, and support for LMI and Environmental Justice communities<sup>12</sup> in the state of New Jersey as well as those across the nation, we are uniquely positioned to shed light on the disproportionate impacts of an inefficient

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<sup>12</sup> The term "environmental justice communities" refers to communities Of Color and communities with low-income.

energy system and the associated toxic air pollution on vulnerable communities, particularly those in frontline and fenceline areas as well as renters and low-income households.

We support the BPU in their ongoing work to support energy efficiency, affordability, cost containment, and ease of access for energy customers. We offer our continued support in advancing these goals within the state in a way that is equitable and just. We are willing to engage in ongoing conversation with the NJ BPU concerning the thoughts presented in these comments.

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