

Response to PUC Energy Cost Stabilization Report



The Public Utility Commission recently released its [Energy-Cost Stabilization Report](#) as ordered by Act 142 of 2024. This report recognizes that an increasing number of Vermonters are struggling with energy costs and finds that a statewide program is needed to lower Vermont's energy burden.

Given this, 350Vermont was disappointed to discover that the PUC opposes the creation of a statewide electric ratepayer protection program. We find its reasons for doing so frustratingly shortsighted and sometimes contradictory.

PUC reason #1: *Electricity is a smaller portion (20%) of Vermonters' energy burden than either transportation (45%) or heating (35%), and therefore, not where we should focus our attention.*

350VT's response: Electrification of the heating and transportation sectors is one of the top solutions for combating the climate crisis. A statewide electric ratepayer protection, combined with increased weatherization assistance and more robust subsidies for cold-climate heat pumps, would make it more accessible for low- and middle-income Vermonters to ease their energy burden by electrifying their heat and transportation.

PUC reason #2: *70% of Vermonters already have access to an electricity assistance program through Green Mountain Power or the Burlington Electric Department.*

“Programs like GMP's are complicated for low-income folks to navigate without help...

those programs are not readily available to us. I use GMP and I didn't know about these programs until recently. I see it on my statements, so that means one has to go to their websites and try to find (them). I have done that and found it complicated and sometimes unable to navigate.”

—Earl Hatley, Veteran & GMP Customer

350VT response: The ~30,000 disconnect notices that GMP sends out every month show that a significant number of families are struggling to pay their bills. Yet only 25-30% of eligible households are enrolled in GMP's program. Clearly, this program is not accessible to burdened populations or

adequate to address their needs. This is undoubtedly because GMP's program offers a small benefit, too small to make a significant difference for many households. Programs in all the other New England states provide much stronger protections. Why can't Vermont?

And what about the 30% of Vermonters who don't have access to an electricity assistance program at all? Half of Vermont's highest energy burden towns are in regions like the NEK served by small utilities. These utilities, as the PUC explains, cannot afford to fund a ratepayer assistance program out of their own small ratepayer base.

350VT's proposed statewide program, on the other hand, would collect funds across VT and distribute them equitably, allowing small utilities to participate. Additionally, it would lower barriers to access through automatic enrollment and offer more significant discounts.

PUC reason #3: Funds to address energy burden should not come from ratepayers, but from a different source, like the General Fund or a tax on fuel with a rebate for lower-income households.

350VT response: In our assessment, the General Fund is not a politically realistic source of funding, given the number of competing priorities for these funds. A tax on fuel with a low-income rebate feels regressive, and low-income

Vermonters don't often have the funds to pay money up front.

In addition, we proposed a solution already in place in Illinois, with no cost to other ratepayers. This solution penalizes private utilities when calculating their rate of return if they don't decrease the number of disconnections. The PUC remained silent about this proposal.

A VT Electric Burden Story

recorded by the Joint Urban Ministry Program

November 2, 2025—MO came to Vermont as a refugee when she was a toddler. Now in her late twenties, MO is multi-lingual, very capable, and a model in her community. MO is a young professional mom; for nearly three years, MO has worked full-time in Burlington. In that time, she divorced, found a new partner, and had a third child, all while keeping her family's budget in order. Her infant son has a serious medical condition, and in July, MO had to take a leave of absence from work to care for him while he recovered from surgery. MO is currently working 15 hours a week and expects to return to work full-time after her son's second surgery in January. Meanwhile, her family has fallen behind on their electric bills: they owe \$1,377.72, and last week their electricity was shut off.

Overall, we feel the PUC's report overlooks:

1. **The importance of electrification** as a solution to both the energy burden and the escalating climate crisis.
2. **The social and economic costs of the status quo**, in which GMP issues ~30,000 disconnection notices per month, and **the inadequacy of current programs**, if they are not bringing those numbers down.
3. The advantages of **one statewide program that serves all Vermonters** rather than an incomplete patchwork of programs.

Questions we have raised in comments to the PUC, so far unanswered:

- [Annotated list of comments filed with PUC](#)
- Despite the fact that 1 out of every 6 GMP customers is receiving midwinter disconnection notices, only 25-30% of eligible households are enrolled in GMP's assistance program; why is the program not working?
- When Vermont ratepayers receive a disconnection notice, what sources of funds do they use to prevent disconnection? Are they relying on

nonprofits and churches? Are they taking out loans? Are they going without food or medicine?

- How much taxpayer money and donations are spent to assist disconnected households that need emergency services and/or become homeless?
- What will be the cost of adopting a tiered discount program similar to Connecticut's? What fixed charges and/or volumetric rates would be needed to fund such a program? GMP and other utilities have the data and the ability to model this for their own service territories.
- How does this cost compare to the social and fiscal costs that a tiered discount program would avoid?
- What is the total of all GMP electric bills owed?
- How much do GMP top executives earn? What were GMP's and its parent company's profits in the past five years?



Questions? Please reach out to Mieke at mieke@350vt.org.