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PROJECT NO. 57743

**REVIEW OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY
SUBSTANTIVE RULES**

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**PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION
OF TEXAS**

COMMENTS BY TEXAS ENERGY POVERTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE (TEPRI)

Texas Energy Poverty Research Institute (TEPRI) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on Project No. 57743, Review of Energy Efficiency substantive rules. TEPRI is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that advances equitable solutions for affordable, reliable, and clean energy for disadvantaged communities across Texas. Our work advances research on the energy needs of low-income households, develops solutions to address those needs, and establishes a network of on-the-ground relationships to enable deployment.

INTRODUCTION

TEPRI supports the need for clear and consistent definitions for low-income households and hard-to-reach areas for energy efficiency rulemaking. We hope that clarifying these definitions will expand access to much-needed services by Texans contending with low incomes. TEPRI's Community Voices of Energy Survey (CVES)¹ data highlights the challenges low-income households face in accessing energy efficiency programs. According to this research, many Texans face hardships due to their inability to afford energy; and also lack awareness of assistance programs. 68% of surveyed households engaged in energy-limiting behaviors, such as keeping their home at an uncomfortable temperature or forgoing other necessities to pay their energy bills. Additionally, 90% of eligible respondents reported never participating in assistance programs despite likely qualifying.

TEPRI and Oncor have developed the Easier Energy Efficiency Eligibility for Texas (E4TX) tool for use by ERCOT's four investor-owned utilities to qualify low-income households for their energy efficiency programs. This tool reduces administrative burdens and speeds up eligibility determinations through an automated verification approach based on data from the Federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Low-Mod Income Summary Data and Qualified Census Tracts. We recommend consistency between this approach and the proposed definitions.

COMMENTS

Question 1. Proposed definitions:

- a. Low Income: Residential households with income levels at or under 80% of the calculated area median income.**
- b. Hard-to-Reach: Rural area where the utility is unable to administer energy efficiency programs in a manner similar to other areas served.**

Low-Income Definition

TEPRI supports establishing a definition for low-income households that facilitates expanded program access statewide. Multiple pathways, such as meeting income thresholds, residing in certain locations, or qualifying through public assistance programs, can better capture households that might otherwise be overlooked. We also recommend consistency with

¹ TEPRI. (2023). "Community Voices in Energy Survey."

commonly cited definitions and the approved low-income income-eligible verification in the Public Utility Commission of Texas Technical Reference Manual Version 12.0 Volume 5: Implementation Guidance Program Year 2025². We recommend including the following criteria in the definition of Low-income households:

1. Residential households with income levels at or below 80% of the calculated area median income (proposed definition; consistent with HUD definitions)³
2. Residential household income is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines⁴;
3. Residences located in a Low-Income Housing-Qualified Census Tract (QTC)⁵ or an area designated by Low and Moderate Income Summary Data (LMISD)⁶
4. Residences where at least one household member receives benefits from the State or Federal programs listed under Category 1A eligibility⁷.

Hard-to-Reach Definition

TEPRI appreciates that the Commission's proposed definition addresses rural communities that often encounter barriers to participating in energy efficiency programs. TEPRI suggests expanding this definition to include other customer categories requiring targeted program adjustments.

These groups may experience specific challenges related to property characteristics (e.g., multifamily housing) or personal circumstances (e.g., older adults, individuals with disabilities, customers with limited English proficiency). TEPRI recommends incorporating a broader range of customer types in the hard-to-reach category, enabling utilities to adopt strategies that address unique barriers to program engagement, ensuring more comprehensive energy efficiency participation across the state.

CONCLUSION

TEPRI appreciates the opportunity to provide these comments and looks forward to continued engagement as the Commission refines and finalizes the energy efficiency rules. By adopting expanded definitions and ensuring target outreach for a wide range of participants, the Commission can help deliver meaningful benefits to those who need them most while strengthening Texas's overall energy efficiency landscape.

Respectfully submitted,

Veronique Placke
Texas Energy Poverty Research Institute

² [Public Utility Commission of Texas \(2025\). "Texas Technical Reference Manual Version 12.0 Volume 5: Implementation Guidance Program Year 2025"](#)

³ [HUD \(n.d.\). "HUD's Public Housing Program"](#)

⁴ [LIHEAP Clearinghouse \(2025\). "Federal Poverty Guidelines for FFY 2025"](#)

⁵ [HUD \(2025\). "Qualified Census Tracts and Difficult Development Areas."](#)

⁶ [HUD \(2025\). "ACS 5-Year 2016-2020 Low- and Moderate-Income Summary Data."](#)

⁷ [Public Utility Commission of Texas \(2025\). "Texas Technical Reference Manual Version 12.0 Volume 5: Implementation Guidance Program Year 2025"](#)