Green & Healthy Homes Initiative®

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On behalf of the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative (GHHI), I offer these comments on the New Jersey Energy Master Plan 2024. GHHI is the administrator of the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities Whole Home Pilot Program in Trenton. GHHI is dedicated to addressing the social determinants of health and advancing racial and health equity through the creation of healthy, safe and energy efficient homes. GHHI has been at the frontline of holistic healthy housing for over three decades.

Over its 30-year history, GHHI has developed the holistic energy efficiency, health and housing service delivery model that is implemented in our nationally recognized, Maryland-based direct service program. The model was adopted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and is currently being advanced in partner jurisdictions nationally. By delivering a standard of excellence, GHHI aims to eradicate the negative health impacts of unhealthy housing and unjust policies to ensure better health, economic, and social outcomes for children, seniors, and families with an emphasis on black and brown low-income communities.

Through our own research and evidence-based practice, GHHI has found that a healthy and energy efficient home yields a multitude of energy and non-energy benefits for residents, particularly low-income residents who can benefit the most from such energy efficiency improvements in terms of economic mobility, housing stability and wealth retention over the long-term. We are deeply committed to advancing racial and health equity, economic mobility and climate resiliency through efficiency standards and electrification for low-income housing.

For these reasons and others, I write in support of the NJBPU Master Plan, specifically to uplift the following strategies and goals:

- Strategy 3: Maximize energy efficiency and conservation and reduce peak demand
    - Goal 3.1: Increase New Jersey's overall energy efficiency
        - Goal 3.1.3: Establish strategic and targeted energy efficiency programs to increase energy reductions and customer engagement.
        - Goal 3.1.4: Establish a clearinghouse for home energy and health and safety programs targeted to low-income households.
    - Goal 3.3: Strengthen building and energy codes and appliance standards
        - Goal 3.3.7: Adopt more stringent appliance standards.

- Strategy 4: Reduce energy consumption and emissions from the building sector
    - Goal 4.2: Start the transition to electrify existing oil- and propane-fueled buildings
        - Goal 4.2.1: Incentivize transition to electrified heat pumps, hot water heaters, and other appliances.
        - Goal 4.2.2: Develop a transition plan to a fully electrified building sector.
- Strategy 6: Support community energy planning and action with an emphasis on encouraging and supporting participation by low- and moderate-income and environmental justice communities
    - Goal 6.4: Identify barriers that prevent the participation in and benefit from the clean energy economy and create outreach programs that work with communities to overcome those obstacles
        - 6.4.1 Provide education and community outreach to low- and moderate-income and environmental justice communities to ensure inclusion in the clean energy future

The Whole-House Pilot in Trenton that GHHI administers is advancing many of these goals in meaningful ways. In addition to directly serving families, the pilot is modeling the service delivery that will reduce program deferrals, increase health benefits, and create pathways to electrification-ready and electrification measures in homes.

Our team is increasing energy efficiency (goal 3.1.3); aligning energy, health, and safety programs (3.1.4); implementing protocols to assess homes for beneficial electrification and electrification-ready measures (4.2); and overcoming the barriers that otherwise prevent participation in the Comfort Partners Program (6.4). This pilot can be a model for increasing energy efficiency and electrification services for low-income households.

In Trenton and across GHHI's programs, GHHI has advanced this holistic "one stop shop" model that aligns, braids, and coordinates the necessary program resources. This model has been proven to yield better health outcomes, energy savings, emissions reductions, and efficiency of service delivery.

Additionally, the model plays a key role in the strategy for home electrification. Home electrification is an essential measure for health and climate sustainability. To include low-income households in this transition, the state must be proactive in developing programs to provide the financial and logistical support to include electrification as a part of a "whole home" approach—braiding health and safety remediations, energy efficiency upgrades like weatherization, and electrification measures such as panel upgrades and appliance replacement.

Homes must be electrified with efficiency measures to ensure that residents see lower utility bills and energy burdens. To complete weatherization interventions that improve building shell efficiency, remediators must first address health and safety barriers, thus the need for the Whole Home Program. A Whole Home Program for low-income households improves energy efficiency in homes and does so in the homes with the greatest co-benefits from the interventions. The

programs lead to improved health outcomes, economic well-being, and neighborhood stability in homes with the most need.

I also write with the following additional requests for New Jersey energy planning:

- Increase the coordination of the Energy Master Plan with health, climate, and housing planning.
- Ensure that continued advancement in energy planning includes measures to prioritize energy affordability including energy efficiency, weatherization, and the development of clean energy resources to bring down energy costs.

The health benefits of reducing pollution from burning fossil fuels are significant for the state of New Jersey. With this comes an opportunity to bring additional planning and partnership to advance New Jersey's energy goals in alignment with improving health outcomes for residents. These partnerships unlock new regulatory, program, funding, and engagement opportunities for advancing clean energy in a way that benefits all New Jersey residents.

The American Lung Association recently released their annual scorecard on outdoor air quality which gave many New Jersey counties failing grades[1]. One building-related policy that may be considered in response is a zero-emission heating equipment standard, which regulates the pollution from heating equipment purchased for use in buildings as a path towards achieving attainment of outdoor air quality standards. Evaluating this policy with health and environmental agencies such as the NJ Dept. of Environment Office of Air Quality Regulation and Radiation Protection may holistically advance New Jersey's energy, climate, and health planning efforts.

Bringing in housing and health partners to planning also can help ensure that communities with the highest needs have resources available to participate in energy programs. Low-income households often contend with older housing stock and limited resources. These conditions can lead to significant levels of deferred maintenance and limited options for residents to address issues. These barriers leave low-income households with higher energy burdens, higher rates of health issues like asthma and lead poisoning, and lower home values statewide.

Respectfully Submitted,

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[1] https://www.lung.org/research/sota/city-rankings/states/new-jersey