



March 4, 2021

Chairs Senator Needleman and Representative Arconti, and Ranking Members Senator Formica and Representative Ferraro, and honorable members of the Energy and Technology committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, in support of Senate Bill 882, An Act Concerning Climate Change Mitigation and Home Energy Affordability; and RB 6526, An Act Concerning Electric Suppliers.

I am Brenda Watson, Executive Director of Operation Fuel. Operation Fuel is a statewide organization that ensures equitable access to energy for all by providing year-round energy assistance, promoting energy independence, and advocating for affordable energy. Operation Fuel partners with local government and community-based organizations throughout Connecticut to ensure that families and individuals in need have access to year-round utility and water assistance.

[If any CT residents listening to us right now need help paying your energy or water bills, please visit our website at [www.operationfuel.org/gethelp](http://www.operationfuel.org/gethelp) and reach out to us.]

In 2019, Gov. Lamont invited Operation Fuel to the Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3), where I co-chaired the Mitigation subcommittee on building energy. I also chair the Low Income Energy Advisory Board, which develops the state's plan to spend federal heating assistance (LIHEAP) in conjunction with the Department of Social Services (DSS), the Office of Policy & Management (OPM), and the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP). Operation Fuel is a member of the National Energy & Utility Assistance Coalition (NEUAC), which organizes and informs advocates nationwide on how to best leverage LIHEAP and other energy assistance in the states.

We have long studied energy affordability in CT, our website details this work at <https://operationfuel.org/about/financialsreports/>. Our 2017 study from economist Roger Colton, and another that year from APPRISE, describe in detail the excessive energy burden faced by LMI households in our state. We followed up on this work in 2020 to examine how transportation burden adds to these costs, in collaboration with researchers at VEIC and the CT Green Bank. In 2020, I joined CT's Energy Efficiency Board (EEB), which manages the state's conservation and load management programs. In recent years the board has particularly focused on LMI consumers. I am also a director of the CT Green Bank board. Bringing on a policy director in 2020, we are also engaged in several dockets regarding clean energy and energy affordability.

First, thank you to Governor Lamont, Commissioner Dykes, Rep. Reyes, the Energy Efficiency Board, the Governor's Council on Climate Change, the leadership of this committee, and everyone who has worked to raise Bill 882. We appreciate your efforts over the years to advance energy efficiency. Bill 882 is a direct result of the work of the GC3, where we consider energy efficiency as an entry point to engage on climate mitigation issues. Governor's Bill 882, An Act Concerning Climate Change Mitigation and Home Energy Affordability is important legislation for our environment, our economy, and our people here in CT. These reforms will especially benefit Low- and Moderate-Income residents that Operation Fuel serves, as well as our state's cost of living and carbon footprint.

At Operation Fuel, we see clients' energy bills every day. Over the years, and especially after the rate increases and power outages last summer, we have found folks are increasingly interested and educated about what charges are on their electric bills, and why. This is particularly the case as more households experience energy loss due to extreme weather events, and as their household income goes down due to the pandemic. The need to save money, reduce energy use, and have access to renewable energy is front and center for consumers, and we must seize this moment. When engaging with applicants for Operation Fuel grants, our team highlights energy use and costs on clients' bills, as well as directing them toward efficiency products from Energize CT and the CT Green Bank. Operation Fuel clients, like many LMI households in our state, deal with drafty windows, leaky pipes, and high energy burden. We believe SB 882 will lead to safer conditions in the home. We encourage the committee to support this legislation, with special attention to ensuring customer data privacy (Lines 124-134) and minimizing costs to ratepayers (Lines 135-140).

**Section 3 [starting line 112]** outlines the crux of the bill, which would require anyone renting or selling a housing unit to disclose the property's energy score. We believe this is important information for consumers, as they consider where to live, and budget for basic needs. We know that electricity costs are one of the leading causes of homelessness, as electricity service is a rental requirement. Disclosing home energy scores up front helps consumers make better informed decisions, as a Car Fax report does when we buy vehicles. A few years after passing this bill, it will seem like a no brainer for potential residents to access and make decisions based on this information. It will be a competitive advantage in real estate transactions. Transparency in energy costs makes our state a more attractive place to live, and is an important step toward reducing the statewide energy affordability gap.

Public disclosure around home energy use would also educate landlords about their buildings' carbon emissions, weatherization standards, and energy efficiency opportunities. This system creates an incentive for building owners to retrofit and upgrade – which most landlords are not currently motivated to do since they don't pay their tenants' electric bills. We have a busy and growing industry of weatherization, remediation, and efficiency contractors in our state, who provide good jobs by making our homes safer. We want CT to be a leader on these issues and believe this bill will push us forward. This is especially important in Environmental Justice Communities that struggle with high pollution and low employment rates.

Again, thank you to the governor, the commissioner, the committee, and everyone on your teams who has worked to move Bill 882 forward.

Because it is on your agenda today, we also want to briefly discuss **Raised Bill 6526, An Act Concerning Electric Suppliers**. Operation Fuel urges you to pass these necessary consumer protections. At Operation Fuel, we offer grants to families struggling to pay their electric bills. We regularly notice that clients apply for help because their rates are way higher than they planned for. The provision of the bill to require that these contracts expire instead of automatically renewing at higher rates (Lines 49-64) is especially important. We want to note the excellent and extensive work of CT's Public Utilities Regulatory Authority, which has examined and ordered protections including for financial hardship customers around third party suppliers. This bill appropriately designates authority to PURA to implement safeguards that take stakeholder input into account, and protect consumers from bad actors in the energy markets. Below is the message we share with applicants when we see unusually variable, high costs on their bills and notice that they are contracted with a 3<sup>rd</sup> party supplier:

Upon processing your application we noticed you are using (**THIRD PARTY SUPPLIER**) as your electricity supplier. Operation Fuel recommends that you visit the [energizeCT](#) website, to access information you need to learn more about generation supply rates and understanding your electric bill. If you use a **THIRD PARTY SUPPLIER** to lower your electric rates, please read the terms in your contract as the rate per kilowatt may change at any time. The first step in saving money on your electric bill, is to understand your electric bill.

Eversource Customers Video: [Understand Your Eversource Electric Bill](#)

UI Customers Video: [Understand Your United Illuminating Electric Bill](#)

We appreciate the legislature's productive working relationship with the regulators at PURA, who address energy affordability and transparency issues in great detail. Operation Fuel is involved with PURA Docket 14-07-19, to redesign electric bills so that they provide more transparent information to CT residents about our energy costs. We are also an intervenor in PURA's investigation of whether to implement a low income discount electricity rates in our state, which would help energy assistance funds from LIHEAP and Operation Fuel to go farther, and help more struggling families with their energy bills. We look forward to further engaging with you on these issues as they develop.

Thank you again to the leadership and committee for taking up these important bills that will benefit consumers, our economy, and our environment. We urge you to pass Bill 882 and HB 6526. Thank you, I am happy to take your questions.

Brenda Watson, MA  
Executive Director, Operation Fuel