

June 6, 2019

Public advocate releases final energy study in effort to help to low-income families

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(Hallowell, Maine) The Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) has released the final report of a study that concludes Maine's low-income residents face higher energy burdens than other residents.

(File attached: "Maine Low-Income Home Energy Burden Study")

The study, completed by Synapse Energy Economics, Inc. of Cambridge, Massachusetts, found that in Maine the average home energy burden for low-income households is 19 percent of annual household income, while the average household burden for all residents is 6 percent of annual household income.

"That disparity is striking and alarming," said Barry Hobbins, Maine's Public Advocate. "Low-income families spend more than three times the rest of us do, as a percentage, on energy. While most people have more to spend on food, health care, medicine, clothing and other basics, it's obvious that high energy costs hit Maine's poor families hard, and young children probably more so. Let's innovate, and find a way to reduce what these folks are forced to spend on energy."

Study authors found that low-income homeowners tend to face higher home energy burdens than renters (22 and 16 percent respectively). Also, bottled propane gas as a heat source drives up energy burdens. Those heating their homes primarily with propane experience an average home energy burden of 41 percent, more than twice as high as the fuel associated with the second highest home energy burden, those who heat their homes with wood.

According to the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, there are 175,924 low-income households in Maine. The study concluded with several recommendations.

“I hope policy makers read this study and heed its message. If we can help low income families spend less on staying warm and keeping the lights on, they should have a little more money for better health and nutrition. That helps all the people of Maine,” Hobbins said.

A PDF copy of the study is attached to this press release. Citizens may download the study by visiting: www.maine.gov/meopa.

In pursuit of affordable, high quality utility services, the Office of the Public Advocate represents Maine utility consumers in any matter reviewed by the Public Utilities Commission, as well as in proceedings before state and federal agencies and courts. For additional information, please contact the Office of the Public Advocate by phone at 207-624-3687 or via email at opa@maine.gov.