



**ASPEN TECH
POLICY HUB**

PROJECT



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with support from
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this project, please visit
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Washington: Right to Cool

Identifying underserved communities of color
in need of cooling assistance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Washington State Department of Commerce State Energy Office should a) encourage utilities to report data on race and ethnicity, b) identify and engage with underserved communities of color, and c) evaluate progress in reducing energy disparities in communities of color. Simultaneously, the State's Department of Commerce Community Service and Housing Division should make existing data from the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) public. By requiring utilities to report on race and ethnicity and making existing data publicly available, both the State and outside community groups can better ensure that communities of color in Washington are having their energy needs adequately supported.

PROBLEM

LIHEAP is a federally funded program for states to provide energy assistance to low-income households. Though the State's LIHEAP office collects race and ethnicity data on households, these data are not available to community and advocacy groups, making it difficult for them to understand whether communities of color are being adequately served by LIHEAP. In addition, other energy assistance programs that run through consumer-owned utilities (COUs) have minimal reporting and accountability and are not required to col-



lect critical race and ethnicity data. This lack of critical data makes it difficult to obtain or develop a statewide assessment of whether communities of color are being served by Washington State's energy assistance programs.

It is time for Washington to heal from the environmental injustice of redlining by providing energy assistance to communities of color.

SOLUTION

The Department of Commerce's State Energy Office should: (a) request that COUs collect race and ethnicity data from energy assistance recipients; (b) assist COUs in collecting these data by offering technical assistance; (c) require that COUs identify underserved communities for targeted outreach; and (d) evaluate whether COU outreach has decreased energy burden in communities of color.

At the same time, the Department of Commerce's Community Service and Housing Division should: (a) place aggregated data on the race and ethnicity of LIHEAP recipients on the Washington Geospatial Open Data Portal; (b) release other critical LIHEAP subgrantee documents online on the Washington Open Data website; and (c) distribute standardized outreach materials to LIHEAP subgrantees to utilize in their outreach to communities of color.

Partnered together, these two solutions will allow Washington utilities and Washington state government to better assist historically marginalized communities with reducing their energy burden, as well as allow the State to realize its overall [goals for reducing energy burden](#). These solutions will also ensure Washington underserved communities of color are provided with adequate access to cooling assistance, a critical need given the [increasing climate risks of our time](#).

For more information about this proposal, see: **(1) a policy brief** to the Washington Department of Commerce describing the team's recommendations; **(2) a policy brief** to Washington's Community Service and Housing Division describing their recommendations; **(3) a sample LIHEAP guide poster**; and **(4) sample social media graphics** to market the LIHEAP program.

ABOUT THE HUB

The Aspen Tech Policy Hub is a Bay Area policy incubator, training a new generation of science and tech policy entrepreneurs.

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