

# AFFORDABLE UTILITIES

BUILDING A BETTER TOMORROW ONE FAMILY AT A TIME



**BIG SKY**  
Brighter Future

Charting the course for a better Montana.

**Covering the monthly bills should not be this hard.** To help families heat their homes in the winter and save for the future, Montana should:

- Invest \$30 million to reduce the backlog of low-income weatherization needs and
- Remove restrictions on investor-owned utilities for community solar projects



You don't realize how much easier life is when you have heat in the house until you don't have heat."

Johna, Missoula

## HOW WE GOT HERE

Energy costs most severely impact families experiencing poverty and families of color, especially those in rural communities. Families living on lower incomes face an energy burden three times higher than other households, while using less energy on average. Nearly a third of U.S. households struggle paying energy bills, and one in five households reduce or forgo food, medicine, or other necessities to pay their energy bills.

Montana currently provides no state funding for weatherization for families with high energy costs. While federal funds provide some assistance to help reduce energy costs, such as fixing a failing roof or installing insulation, families living on low incomes may have to wait up to eight years before receiving weatherization assistance.

With low winter temperatures and sunny skies for much of the year, Montana has the potential to alleviate some energy burden by allowing community solar projects. Currently, policy barriers exclude and discriminate against farmers, renters, multi-family units, multi-meter properties, shaded rooftops, and those who cannot afford a full installation.

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## ON THE HORIZON

1

**Invest \$30 million in state funds to reduce the backlog of low-income weatherization needs.** Providing funding for local programs to help provide greater support for those needing weatherization assistance would help many families afford to heat their homes. Funds would be directed through the Department of Public Health and Human Services Low-Income Energy Assistance Program to shorten the wait time for families needing weatherization assistance and expand the population served so families with major home energy problems, like a hole in the roof, could receive assistance. An investment of \$30 million would help weatherize nearly 4,000 homes. Funds would be distributed to energy assistance offices by share of the total eligible population served.

2

**Remove restrictions on investor-owned utilities for community solar projects.** Currently Montana restricts solar projects for investor-owned utilities to those that are smaller than 50 kilowatts, only offset one meter, and are on one property. Removing these restrictions would help stabilize energy costs and provide access to solar for those unable to install on their own homes. Community solar projects would enable families, businesses, schools, and other utility customers to buy a share of a large, shared solar array located off their property, providing access to the benefits of solar for those unable to install on their own homes.



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## ABOUT BIG SKY BRIGHTER FUTURE

Big Sky Brighter Future is charting a clear course to rebuild our state. This concrete plan for lawmakers has specific proposals to help families, workers, children, and communities, and creates a tax code that works for everyone. Montana cannot go back to the time when families faced barriers to build their best future. We can move our state forward and make it one where we can all live, work, and enjoy all Big Sky Country has to offer. There's a better Montana on the horizon, and this is how we get there.