

Empowering North Carolina

A Guide to Advocating for Energy Equity



RETI

Renewable Energy
Transition Initiative



RETI is Solving the Heat or Eat Dilemma for North Carolina's Energy Poor

When families with limited financial means are faced with high-energy bills they can't afford, they have to make serious choices about the bills they pay each month. They may have to cut back on essentials like food, medicine, and transportation in order to keep the lights and heat on.

This heat or eat dilemma facing many North Carolina residents happens when they pay a disproportionate portion of their incomes on their energy expenses—usually more than 10 percent.

Many low-income families in North Carolina spend 20 percent or more each month on these costs. In fact, more than 1.5 million households needed assistance to pay their energy bills in the past year thanks in part to energy poverty.

However, only about 1 in 10 of those households received the life-saving assistance they needed—and usually for only one month on average.

That's why RETI, the Renewable Energy Transition Initiative, is working to reduce energy poverty in North Carolina by:

- Decreasing the energy costs of low-income families through the adoption of renewable, clean-energy technologies
- Educating residents on renewable energy solutions and encouraging the use of energy-efficient technologies

This guide will help you advocate for energy equity for all North Carolinians, which makes energy-efficient solutions available to all families.

What is Energy Poverty?

Energy is an increasingly important social and public health concern for more and more North Carolinians.

As costs for residential heating, cooling, and other household energy needs increase significantly, they account for a greater percentage of household budgets. This is referred to as energy poverty or energy insecurity.

Those impacted by energy insecurity allocate a higher share of their incomes to their utility expenses—partly because of rising energy costs and partly because of the energy inefficiencies of many lower income homes.

Low-income homes tend to be older homes with appliances that are not energy efficient and lack proper insulation to slow heat loss in colder months.

The energy poor may be homeowners who are unable to invest in energy-efficient upgrades because of high up-front costs or may be renters living in homes where landlords do not pay the utility bills and thus have little incentive to create more energy-efficient units.

North Carolina Energy Poverty Facts & Figures*

286,539 households living below 50% of the federal poverty level spent

29%

of their annual incomes on energy bills

371,583 households living within 50-100% of the federal poverty level spent

16%

of their annual incomes on energy bills

207,464 households living within 100-125% of the federal poverty level spent

11%

of their annual incomes on energy bills

The Federal Home Energy Assistance Program helped cover 90,528 heating and cooling bills for low-income households in 2016.

*Source: Home Energy Affordability Gap 2016, Fisher, Sheehand & Colton

About Renewable Energy & Energy Efficiency

Using renewable energy sources like wind, solar, geothermal, hydroelectric, and biomass to generate more of the country's electricity can:

- Reduce global-warming CO2 emissions and related health issues, including breathing problems, neurological disorders, heart attacks, and cancer
- Improve the economy by creating jobs: On average, more jobs are created for each unit of electricity generated from renewable energy sources.
- Help stabilize energy prices in the future because of its renewability

Increasing energy efficiency in lower income housing is a practical solution for reducing energy poverty. Less energy-efficient homes and appliances use more energy to perform the same function as their more energy-efficient counterparts. Here are some ways to increase energy efficiency in lower income housing:

- Use Energy Star appliances, which guarantees a certain level of energy efficiency
- Take advantage of tax savings for making energy-efficient upgrades to appliances, windows, and doors
- Add insulation to your walls and attic to prevent loss of warm air in the winter and cool air in the summer



Advocacy 101: How to Advocate for Energy Equity in North Carolina

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

- Margaret Mead

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy simply means actively supporting a cause and trying to get others to support it as well—particularly government officials who can create and change laws.

Advocacy is one of the most effective approaches to generating energy equity across all populations in North Carolina. Plus, it’s something you as an individual citizen or group of citizens can do to help others.

Legislators need to know what’s happening in the communities they represent. You can provide them with valuable information and insight on a particular issue by sharing how it impacts individual citizens and the community as a whole

ABCs of Advocacy: Ask for something specific
Be persistent | **Courtesy is key**—be professional and gracious.

Starting an Advocacy Campaign

Before any advocacy campaign begins, you need to have a plan of action to accomplish the goals you have in mind. Here are five key questions to consider when working on your plan:

1

What Do You Want to Achieve?

An advocacy campaign must begin with a clear sense of what you aim to achieve. Your initial objective, such as increasing energy efficiency in multifamily housing or creating solar farms to offset energy costs for the energy poor, should be specific and attainable in a specified period of time

2

Who Can Give It to You?

The primary audience for your advocacy campaigns should be the people who have the authority to give you what you want. In this case, your audience will be state and federal legislators who can make laws and policies that can decrease the number of energy poor and increase energy equity in North Carolina. Carolina.

To determine who your state senator or representative is, visit www.ncleg.net/representation/WhoRepresentsMe.aspx

3

What Do They Need to Hear?

An advocacy campaign must have a clear, consistent, and persuasive message for the target. It's important to aim your messages specifically for each government official you are meeting with based on their political ideologies and policy history.

4

Whom Do They Need to Hear It From?

The same message will have a very different impact depending on who communicates it. In general, an advocacy campaign should have messengers with credibility as experts, some who can speak from personal experience, and others who have connections with the person or group you have targeted

5

How Can You Get Them to Hear It?

Advocacy campaigns can deliver their message in many different ways, such as in-person visits, letters, emails, phone calls, and petitions. You need to look at all your options and determine a mix that has the potential to create the most optimal results.

Once you have answered these questions, make sure you write down the details of your plan and establish a timeline for action. Your campaign will be most effective if you make a coordinated effort to target change.

Communicating with Your Legislator

Your advocacy plan should take a multi-pronged approach that includes in-person visits, handwritten letters, individual emails, phone calls, and social media. In-person visits tend to be the most effective tool at your disposal when advocating for or against specific legislation.

Setting Up a Visit

Contact the scheduler in your legislator's office to make an appointment with your congressman or senator or a staff member who covers your issue. Let them know the dates you are available, the issue you want to discuss, and who will be present during the visit. Make sure you identify yourself as a constituent in their district to get scheduling priority. Be sure to confirm a day or two in advance of the visit.

Making Your Visit

A good rule of thumb is to have a specific agenda for your meeting and to select a primary spokesperson for your group. You will want to have a list of talking points to help guide the conversation, which includes the key messages and stories you identified in your five questions. Be sure to use personal experiences and make your ask within the first five minutes of the meeting in case it gets cut short.

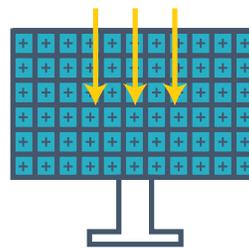
End on a positive note, thanking the legislator or staffer for their time and leaving behind a short written summary of your issue. Then follow up with a thank-you letter a few days later.

Tips for Calling

- Ask to speak to the staff member who covers the particular issue you want to address.
- Identify yourself as a constituent and a person of faith.
- Clearly and briefly state your position on the issue.
- Thank the staff person for his/her time and follow up with a letter.

Tips for Writing a Letter or Emailing

- State your purpose for writing in the first sentence.
- Then identify your issue and make a specific request.
- Focus on only one issue per message.
- Personalize the message. Identify why it matters to you and include a story that illustrates how it impacts your community.
- Ask specific questions, which may prompt something more than a form letter in reply.



Looking for Advocacy Resources?

RETI has a complete library of talking points, planning materials, and letters and emails to help you with your advocacy efforts.

You'll also find information on specific energy-related legislation pending in North Carolina's General Assembly.

www.reti.org/library



About the North Carolina Legislature

North Carolina is governed by three branches of government: the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch. The legislative branch is composed of the General Assembly, which has the authority to:

- Make new laws and amend or repeal laws that affect state citizens and communities
- Establish rules and regulations governing the conduct of the people, their rights, duties, and procedures
- To prescribe the consequences of certain activities

The General Assembly has two houses; a 50-member Senate and a 120-member House of Representatives. Members are elected for two-year terms. It also has a number of Legislative Committees, with representatives from the House or Senate, that decide if legislation will be subject to vote by the General Assembly.

Legislative Sessions

The General Assembly meets in regular session beginning in January of each odd-numbered year and adjourns to reconvene the following even-numbered year for a shorter session.

The Senate and the House of Representatives meet in their respective chambers on Monday evenings; at 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday; and on Friday mornings. The members return to their districts to take care of their affairs and meet with constituents during the weekend.

During the week, committee meetings are held in the morning and late afternoon. A great deal of the legislative work is done in the committee meetings.

To determine your state Senator or Representative, visit the NC General Assembly website.
www.ncleg.net/representation/WhoRepresentsMe.aspx



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