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NC Interfaith Power & Light Joins Legal Fight for ‘Energy Justice’

North Carolina environmental advocates seek to ensure that low-wealth people have reliable access to affordable electricity and can generate their own power.

RALEIGH, NC — North Carolina Interfaith Power & Light, a program of the North Carolina Council of Churches, has [filed a petition to intervene](#) in the fight for energy justice in North Carolina as the state transitions to a carbon-free economy. If granted, the petition would make the faith-based environmental organization a party to legal proceedings to ensure low-wealth North Carolinians have reliable access to affordable electricity as the state moves toward clean, renewable energy.

Low-wealth communities contributed little to the climate crisis but face the prospect of steep increases in electricity rates under a statewide [decarbonization plan](#) now under review. The current plan fails to ensure equitable access to programs to help low-wealth people generate their own electricity as the climate changes. At the same time, these communities, which are disproportionately of color, are largely left out of the process.

“As our state moves toward clean energy, we must ensure we all have access to the electricity we need to meet our basic needs,” said Susannah Tuttle, Director of NC Interfaith Power & Light. “Energy for some is not an option. We need energy justice for all.”

The proceedings come nearly a year after North Carolina passed [House Bill 951](#), which commits the state to slashing carbon emissions by 70 percent by 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. Although the law directs the North Carolina Utilities Commission (NCUC) to maintain responsibility for developing a carbon plan and reaching carbon reduction goals, the NCUC has outsourced plan development to Duke Energy, the state’s main electricity producer. At the same time, the commission is neither requiring nor facilitating meaningful input from low-wealth ratepayers.

In January, North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper issued an executive order calling for a series of public hearings and procedural reviews on the proposed plan, which Duke Energy filed in May. The first two were held this week in Durham and Wilmington, and three more will be held later this summer — in Asheville, Charlotte, and online.

As an intervenor, NC Interfaith Power & Light is represented by Ryke Longest, a clinical law professor at Duke University, and part of a broad coalition of local and regional advocates, including the Center for Progressive Reform, which recently launched a Campaign for Energy Justice in North Carolina.

In addition to an affordable plan that meaningfully incorporates input from low-wealth communities, NC Interfaith Power & Light is calling for programs to help low-wealth North Carolinians generate their own electricity, upgrade their energy plans and weatherize their homes, pay unpaid bills, and more.

“We need a power plan that empowers all people, not just the wealthy,” said Ajulo Othow, founder and CEO of EnerWealth Solutions and a board member of the Center for Progressive Reform. “Once again, a major corporation is essentially writing the rules, and low-wealth people are being shut out of the process. North Carolina cannot address the climate crisis without taking equity into full and fair account. Justice demands it.”

The South Atlantic region, including North Carolina, has the [greatest number of households with high energy burdens](#) (where energy costs exceed 6 percent of household income). Nearly 1.5 million residents are [overburdened by energy costs](#), and many pay more for energy than housing. Some [1 million North Carolina families](#) are behind on electric, water, and sewage bills, forcing them to choose between keeping the lights on and other needs.

“The rent is *already* too high — and, for many, electricity bills are *even higher*,” Tuttle said. “Higher utility prices threaten to leave even more North Carolina families without power to heat, cool, and light homes; recharge their health-related devices; connect to work, school, and their communities; and cook, clean, relax, and play. If we don’t act now, it will only get worse.”

To learn more, read NC Interfaith Power & Light’s public comments and [other materials](#) developed by the Center for Progressive Reform’s Campaign for Energy Justice, [attend an upcoming hearing](#), and follow the Center on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#).

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NC Interfaith Power & Light is a program of the [North Carolina Council of Churches](#) and a state affiliate of the national [Interfaith Power & Light Campaign](#), which has partnered with millions of people of faith and thousands of congregations to address climate change since 2000.

The [Center for Progressive Reform](#) is a nonprofit research and advocacy organization that harnesses the power of law and public policy to create a responsive government, a healthy environment, and a just society.