

Evidence-Based Solutions for Addressing Energy Insecurity

Sanya Carley and David Konisky, Indiana University

Households that cannot pay their energy bill or access basic services like heat or electricity are experiencing what's called energy insecurity. Without access to energy services, people cannot stay warm, keep perishable food or refrigerable medicines cold, or power electronics like e-learning or medical devices. Our study showed which policy interventions can actually keep families warm, safe, and healthy.

HOW PREVALENT IS ENERGY INSECURITY IN THE U.S.?

In just the last year...

 **4.7 million**

low-income households were unable to pay an energy bill

 **4.8 million**

received a notice for utility disconnection

 **2 million**

were disconnected from the electric grid

HOW HAS COVID-19 AFFECTED ENERGY INSECURITY?

In the first four months of the pandemic, of low-income households...

struggled to pay their energy bills

20%

were disconnected from their energy provider


7%


This was despite protections in place in over half of the states to prevent utility disconnections.

WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO BE ENERGY INSECURE?

There are significant racial disparities in the incidence of energy insecurity. Those disparities worsened over the first four months of the pandemic.

When compared to low-income white households, **Black and Hispanic households** are:

 **2x** more likely to be unable to pay their energy bills

 **4-8x** more likely to be disconnected from the electric grid

WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MY CONSTITUENTS?

Short term:



Energy bill assistance



general financial assistance that can be applied to various forms of material hardship, as was intended with the **CARES Act stimulus checks**

Long term:



ban utility disconnections



offer debt relief payment plan assistance when those disconnection protections lapse



continue to build and more substantively fund energy assistance programs like **LIHEAP**



provide energy efficiency assistance to energy insecure households through programs such as the **Weatherization Assistance Program**

HOW DO WE KNOW THAT CASH ASSISTANCE COMBATS ENERGY INSECURITY DIRECTLY?

Our study shows that households that received cash assistance from the federal government had lower rates of energy insecurity. LIHEAP emergency assistance recipients and people who received a CARES Act check were less likely to miss paying a bill or face the risk of service disconnections.



However, resources available from LIHEAP are limited and subject to overcoming significant administrative obstacles.