



Testimony Before the Public Health Committee 3/24/21
House Bill 6653, An Act Concerning Healthy Homes

Dear Public Health Committee Chairs Daugherty Abrams and Steinberg, Vice Chairs Anwar, Kushner, and Gilcrest, Ranking Members Hwang, Somers, and Petit, and distinguished members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Sierra Club and our more than 40,000 members and supporters in Connecticut, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 6653, An Act Concerning Healthy Homes, and to offer recommendations to further improve the bill for your consideration.

Sierra Club supports House Bill 6653 to increase access to the state's ratepayer funded energy efficiency program and address environmental and health issues that often prevent low to moderate income ratepayers from fully accessing the program. Energy assessments provided by Energize CT and WAP locate and identify hazardous conditions. Up to 30% of low to moderate income homes have one or more hazards such as gas leaks, asbestos, mold, knob-and-tube electrical wiring, and pests. These hazards impact human health and are also barriers to full weatherization and the benefits of weatherization including increased comfort, lowered energy bills, and greenhouse gas emission reduction.

We also offer a recommendation to improve the health and climate benefits of the pilot program at the heart of this bill: ensure that any fossil fuel appliances and equipment replaced as part of this pilot are replaced with high efficiency all-electric alternatives.

Connecticut's 2018 Comprehensive Energy Strategy estimated \$54 million in hospitalizations and emergency room visits for acute asthma treatment alone can be attributed to home-based environmental hazards.¹ There is also a growing body of research about the negative health impacts of fossil fuels. A Harvard report released last month shows that an annual 8 million premature deaths worldwide and over 350,000 in the United States were a direct consequence of burning fossil fuel.² The combustion of gas in buildings produces a range of air pollutants with both acute and chronic health effects. A recent UCLA study found that after an hour of cooking on a gas stove, 98 percent of smaller apartments had peak levels of NO₂ that exceeded state and national air-quality standards.³ In other words, the air quality inside nearly every apartment was so bad that it would be illegal if measured outside.

The climate benefits of a zero-emission, all-electric requirement are also well documented. For the average house using a gas water heater and a gas furnace, electrification today can cut related household emissions nearly 50-75%. The climate benefits of electrification will only increase as Connecticut decarbonizes our grid to be zero-carbon by 2040.⁴ Conversely, allowing fossil fuel equipment locks in greenhouse gas emissions for decades to come.

Thank you for consideration of our testimony. We look forward to working with you on this bill and urge your support.

Sincerely,
Ann Gadwah, Advocacy and Outreach Organizer
Sierra Club Connecticut

¹ <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/energy/CES/BuildingsSectorpdf.pdf>

² <https://www.seas.harvard.edu/news/2021/02/deaths-fossil-fuel-emissions-higher-previously-thought>

³ <https://coeh.ph.ucla.edu/effects-residential-gas-appliances-indoor-and-outdoor-air-quality-and-public-health-california>

⁴ <https://www.sierraclub.org/sites/www.sierraclub.org/files/Building%20Electrification%20Action%20Plan%20for%20Climate%20Leaders.pdf>