



RE: Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee meeting

Testimony from Steve Luxton, CEO/Executive Director of ECA /106 W. Clearfield St.
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“Home repairs as a blight prevention strategy”

I lead ECA, an agency that was formed 38 years ago to prevent utility shut-offs in low- to moderate-income households, and it has since become one of Philadelphia’s largest organizations in terms of providing services and assistance to the disadvantaged and vulnerable communities in the nation’s poorest big city.

I have been involved in residential low-income weatherization for close to three decades. I led the weatherization efforts in southeastern PA utility-funded Low income Usage Reduction Program, referred to as LIURP, a PUC-mandated program that was designed to lower high energy usage and ultimately reduce arrearages with the utilities.

At ECA, the services we provide have broadened from low-income advocacy to weatherization, running the city-funded Heater Hotline and federally-funded LIHEAP Crisis program that will not uncommonly in any typical year, restore heat to upwards of five thousand low-income households.

Additionally, we have Neighborhood Energy Centers, a network of 16 offices located throughout Philadelphia in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods that are designed to be the local go-to resource for households that need assistance with energy and budget counseling.

In 2010, we added the Knight Green Jobs Training Center at the height of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, ARRA. Our center was opened by then Secretary of Energy, Dr. Steven Chu and Senator Arlen Specter.

Since then, we have trained close to 5,000 students, most of them coming from vulnerable communities including returning citizens. Our focus is to grow the green collar workforce by training students to provide energy and environmental services that will not only provide them livable wages but at the same time, benefit the environment.

In terms of housing, my perspective is unique as I have provide services to low-income households not only throughout the entire state, but throughout the country during my career.

Whether the home is suburban, rural or urban, the consistent single largest issue that we experience is a home that has physical issues that are concerning and could potentially be exacerbated by reducing air changes in the home. The best and most common example is uncontrolled moisture intrusion. A leaking roof, basement seepage (even intermittent basement seepage) and leaking plumbing lines - supply and waste.

Correcting these defects in most cases costs money to resolve and in many situations, are cost-prohibitive to the elderly homeowner on fixed income, or the under-employed parents with children – discretionary income is well beyond reach and at best, the problem at best is band-aided.

The problems likely only worsen and with no options to fix them, they can fester and/or become safety hazards. I personally have been in homes where:

- ∞ five gallon pails are lined up in the second floor bedrooms and hallway, full of dirty water;
- ∞ homes where planks are put over failed sub-flooring, communicating air from the underlying crawl space into the home's air and risking injury
- ∞ seniors who have lived for years without an operable domestic water heater, heating water on their stove tops, taking the water pot by pot to use their bath;

Eventually, the disrepair can make the home inhabitable, causing home abandonment.

I recently was privileged to have a conversation with Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm, who also graced our training center (that's two Secretaries of Energy!!) recently, and I figured I would specifically raise this issue while I have the highest ranking person at a government level's ear.

When I raised the concern to her, she looked at me and exclaimed, " I know, what is that about? Not having the ability to repair low-income homes that are in poor condition – it's common sense?!"

Obviously it's not that simple but clearly this matter will undoubtedly improve the health and safety, not to mention quality of life, for the economically disadvantaged homeowners who need the most basic necessity of society – A home.

Lastly, we are also the sole provider of weatherization in the state of Delaware. A quasi- governmental agency was created, *Energize Delaware*, and among the many energy related projects it has developed and funded, a program referred to as *Pre-WAP*, was created to make the homes enrolled in WAP weatherization ready.

At this time, statistically, over 50% of the homes that apply for WAP, are rejected or "deferred" due to problems that WAP will not accept. Without this program, in Delaware alone, annually, that's approximately 200 homes that would have been deferred and likely, not repaired.

Row homes, single family detached, multi-family and manufactured homes all comprise the diverse housing stocks in Pennsylvania that can be in dire need of repair and minimal opportunities for all.

I thank you for allowing me to speak before you today.

Steve Luxton
CEO/Executive Director I ECA