

September 10, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Senate Minority Leader  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senator Majority Leader  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
House Speaker House  
1236 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
2468 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senate Majority Leader Schumer, Senate Minority Leader McConnell, House Speaker Pelosi and House Minority Leader McCarthy:

*Re: Methane Gas Emissions Fee Budget Reconciliation Legislation*

The National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition (NEUAC) is a nationwide alliance of like-minded advocates committed to heightening the awareness of energy insecurity and effects of energy poverty. Our members represent the voices of more than 34 million households that struggle to afford the basics, including safe and healthy homes with access to life-critical energy resources.

On behalf of our dedicated members, we commend congressional efforts to curb the potent methane emissions responsible for global warming. Slowing climate change will increase air quality, reduce the likelihood of weather-related natural disasters, and improve the overall living conditions for the communities and households we serve.

However, it is critical that those same vulnerable households not bear the economic burden of such decisions. Access to reliable, affordable energy is particularly important as our country recovers and responds to COVID-19. Households in poverty already suffer from energy burdens that average three times higher than regular-income households.

To that end, NEUAC would like to express our concern regarding the proposed methane emissions fee in the budget reconciliation bill and its potential to negatively impact American families, particularly those who are on fixed or limited incomes. Passing on those costs to consumers would increase utility bills and energy burden substantially for those with the least means to address the rising costs.

The COVID-19 crisis has triggered an economic threat to families rarely experienced more than once in a generation. Utility arrearages reached staggering levels during the pandemic, and vulnerable communities need time to build back stability. Three variations of the methane tax have been introduced recently. Analysis by the American Gas Association has estimated that increases to customer natural gas bills ranging from 12% to 34%, with the average cost from \$85 to \$242 per year. Energy bills could increase substantially as companies pass on the cost of these

fees to consumers, exacerbating the economic hardships already born by those same households. We request that Congress act immediately to correct this situation and ensure that vulnerable populations are considered when enacting this or any future forward-thinking energy legislation.

Residential natural gas accounts for nearly half of the homes in the United States for heating water and living spaces. Natural gas is the lowest cost energy option available to many families, and an increase in fuel cost would amplify the economic consequences that have resulted from the pandemic and create a burden on existing utility assistance programs. Any policy that would exacerbate these conditions should be thoroughly examined and reconsidered.

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), the federal government's flagship program for addressing energy affordability, also is tremendously underfunded, able to serve just one in five eligible households with current resources. A methane fee, levied onto the same eligible population, would further stretch the already insufficient grant dollars.

Respectfully, NEUAC and our members ask that Congress reevaluate this policy in light of the economic consequences posed for vulnerable households. Thank you for your perseverance on progressive energy policy and consideration for energy justice, energy democracy, and energy affordability when creating such policies. We look forward to partnering with you to formulate thoughtful policies that take these views into consideration.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "K. Metzler".

Katrina Metzler, Executive Director

*on behalf of*

The National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition