

Dear Members of the Joint Low-Income Oversight Board (LIOB), Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), California Public Utilities Commission Energy Division, and Investor-Owned Utility Partners,

On behalf of Music Changing Lives and the Changing Lives Association, we appreciate the opportunity to provide community-based input toward the development of the Low-Income Needs Assessment (LINA) 2028 Study. For more than two decades, our organizations have served low-income families across the Inland Empire through youth development, food security initiatives, community health programming, workforce development, and neighborhood revitalization efforts.

Through direct service and ongoing engagement with vulnerable households, we have witnessed how rising energy costs, extreme heat conditions, aging housing stock, and limited awareness of assistance programs place disproportionate burdens on Inland Empire residents. Energy affordability is not an isolated issue; it intersects with housing instability, public health outcomes, food insecurity, and economic mobility.

We respectfully urge that the LINA 2028 Study prioritize deeper regional analysis and community-driven research approaches that reflect the lived experiences of families in inland, low-income communities.

Key Community Concerns

- Inland Empire households face extreme summer heat conditions that significantly increase energy usage, while many families lack efficient cooling systems or avoid using air conditioning due to cost concerns.
- Older rental housing units often lack energy efficiency upgrades, leaving tenants responsible for high utility bills without the authority to improve property conditions.
- Many eligible households remain unaware of programs such as CARE and ESA or face barriers navigating enrollment systems that are not culturally or linguistically accessible.
- Energy shutoffs create cascading crises for families, particularly those with young children, elderly residents, or medical needs.
- Multigenerational and overcrowded households—common in our region—experience higher energy demands that are not adequately reflected in traditional household metrics.

These realities highlight the need for research that goes beyond statewide averages and captures regional disparities affecting inland communities.

Policy Proposals to Advance Equitable Energy Access

1. Establish a Community Energy Navigator Pilot Program

We propose the creation of state-funded Community Energy Navigator hubs operated through trusted community-based organizations. These hubs would assist low-income families with CARE and ESA enrollment, energy literacy education, efficiency upgrade referrals, and shutoff prevention support.

Community-rooted organizations such as Music Changing Lives and the Changing Lives Association are uniquely positioned to serve as implementation partners due to longstanding relationships with residents, culturally competent outreach practices, and integrated service networks. A pilot program in the Inland Empire could serve as a scalable model for statewide implementation.

2. Prioritize Regional Heat Equity and Climate Resilience Funding

We recommend that LINA 2028 establish a research and funding priority focused on “Inland Heat Equity Zones,” recognizing that inland regions experience more extreme climate conditions and energy burdens than coastal areas.

Targeted investments should support cooling assistance, weatherization programs for older housing, tenant-protection energy policies, and resilience infrastructure in high-heat, low-income communities. Data collected through LINA can inform equitable funding allocations that reflect climate realities and public health risk factors.

3. Create a Community Co-Design Research Framework

We urge the CPUC and IOUs to formally incorporate Community-Based Organizations as research partners, not solely outreach channels, within the LINA study process.

Community partners should be funded to co-design surveys, facilitate listening sessions, validate findings, and ensure culturally responsive data collection.

Organizations like Music Changing Lives and the Changing Lives Association can serve as bridges between policymakers and underserved residents, ensuring inclusive participation from families whose voices are often absent from formal research processes.

This approach strengthens data accuracy, builds public trust, and ensures that future program design reflects genuine community needs.

Closing

Energy equity is foundational to economic stability, public health, and quality of life. Inland Empire families deserve research-driven solutions that recognize regional disparities and empower community institutions to be part of the solution.

We stand ready to partner with the CPUC, IOUs, and state leaders to ensure that the LINA 2028 Study advances policies that are inclusive, data-informed, and community-centered.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

Josiah Bruny

Music Changing Lives

CEO

www.MusicChangingLives.org

<https://calendly.com/musicchanginglives/meeting-with-josiah-bruny>