

Testimony of Leticia Colon de Mejias
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Before the
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Workforce Development

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Chairman Crow, Ranking Member Kim, and honorable members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on how the clean energy economy—and energy efficiency in particular—can create good-paying local career paths which will act like catalysts and support small businesses and economic growth across the country.

I am Leticia Colon de Mejias, CEO of Energy Efficiency Solutions, Chair of Efficiency for All, and Policy Co-Chair of the Building Performance Association. I founded the home performance company Energy Efficiency Solutions (EES) in Windsor, CT in 2010. My direct service companies, EES Go Green, and Green Eco Warriors, which I also co-founded in 2008, have completed weatherization and comprehensive energy efficiency upgrades in over 14,000 Connecticut homes and 10 million square feet of multifamily properties. Beyond these direct services we have provided community education and outreach providing over 40,000 books and comic books which are STEM certified Energy Efficiency and Clean Energy Educational tools to communities across our nation. We have also trained people for these careers and helped others start their own companies. We also serve in the state of Massachusetts providing insulation and building science-based upgrades for commercial properties such as schools and through the MASS SAVES program, we have educated thousands of students at over 40 inner city schools.¹

We believe that knowledge is the power required to invigorate the American economy and provide career paths for those who have been historically left behind.

BACKGROUND

I started Energy Efficiencies Solutions to lower carbon emissions and draw down the impacts of climate change on underserved and underrepresented communities. I left a successful 16-year career in healthcare because I wanted to ensure communities of color and the communities that I lived in and worked with had the support to directly draw down their energy usage, energy costs, energy related pollution and carbon emissions. I saw opportunities to create new career paths for communities which were unaware of these energy careers, and which were historically

¹ <https://www.gewportal.org/magazine/>

underemployed or unemployed. In Connecticut, where I live, we have the highest cost per kilowatt-hour in the nation. As the cost of energy continues to rise, the suffering in the communities I serve rises, too. In my state, over 400,000 households cannot afford their electric bills. Far too often, I have seen the elderly and children with no heat in their homes enduring winter temperatures. I have had to go in when their pipes busted and when they are at their greatest levels of despair. If I never joined this career, I would have never known how serious and important it is that we take immediate action to expand energy efficiency, demand reduction and clean energy in communities that have been historically left behind. Often our silo approach to solving problems widens disparity gaps, builds walls, and creates unnecessary hurdles for communities of color and underrepresented groups. Our approach seeks to build bridges and develop steppingstones to close those historic gaps for working families and underemployed.

There is no faster way to lift a family, a household, or a community than to provide viable, accessible career paths which allow Americans the capacity to financially support their families by having a good job.²

Energy efficiency is not only critical to improving energy affordability and quality of life for American families, it is also an engine for job growth and economic opportunity. In my work, I have seen how investment in efficiency can support good-paying local jobs and make a difference in people's lives, especially for underrepresented communities. At EES, we've utilized our Time, Talent, Teamwork and Tenacity to develop a staff of 22 people to serve over 1,400 households a year and draw down energy demand at colleges, community centers, fire stations, businesses, schools, and households. We've also spun new businesses off our original business, which are owned by people of color, women, and veterans. Beyond that, we created a program that helps our employees learn fiscal responsibility, understand civic engagement, learn how to buy houses and cars, start businesses, and ultimately help them find pathways which they can then share with their family and friends. These models can easily be replicated across our nation.

When we say EES is here to serve, we're not referring to the service of testing your HVAC combustion zones or installing insulation and windows. We're talking about service at the deepest level—the service that recognizes our need as human beings to be safe, to stay warm, to be fed, to be seen, to be heard, to be connected, and to find success. I strongly believe that human success begins with these principles, and this philosophy has led me to expand programs that reduce energy demand, energy costs, energy burdens, and energy pollution. Innovation is important—but we should also communicate our present-day successes, too, so that we can connect others to amazing opportunities in the clean energy space.

SMALL BUSINESSES POWER CLEAN ENERGY

As a small business owner, employer, entrepreneur, and policy co-chair of the Building Performance Association, I know firsthand that small businesses are the backbone of the Residential Energy Efficiency and Clean Energy industry. According to E4TheFuture's Energy Efficiency Jobs in America Report, in my home state of Connecticut 95 percent of energy efficiency (EE) businesses have less than 100 employees—and over 50 percent have five or

² https://efficiencyforall.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/EE-Health_2-18-2019_Flyer.pdf

fewer.³ It is extremely important that small businesses be at the table during the planning phases as we build our infrastructure for the clean energy economy. We are flexible and hire locally, providing jobs that can close long standing economic disparities. I believe there are no better groups than small business owners to bring people to new opportunities and careers.

Unfortunately, small businesses often do not have the time to keep up with what is going on here on Capitol Hill, nor the resources to make our voices heard during the legislative process. This can lead to policies that don't work for small businesses; policies that might have laudable goals but that aren't able to achieve those goals because they don't work on the ground. That is why today's hearing, and the work of this Subcommittee is so important. Inviting us to the table during the policymaking process can often avoid the bumps and bruises of developing new federal programs, or services, saving the federal government and taxpayer millions of dollars. Often, the best ideas come from the boots-on-the-ground trying to find ways to solve everyday industry problems as we listen to the communities we serve and the staff we employ.

WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

Finding workers that are skilled is difficult for every sector—but the energy efficiency (EE) and clean energy sectors have particularly suffered. I believe this is due to a lack of public awareness resulting in a lack of stable funding, support, and a start-stop approach. Training for these jobs is not that difficult, but it does require that workers have a basic understanding of building science and interpersonal soft skills. Unfortunately, what I have learned in my career is that many public schools do not teach this type of contextualized science and are often overly focused on technology leaving people lacking in interpersonal and soft skills. A lack of exposure to hands-on learning or work opportunities results in a lack of tenacity in our workforce. Contractors and industry leaders also struggle with a lack of soft skills, such as the ability to inform an employer about difficulties related to transportation, childcare, or other conflicts. When I started my company in 2010, we designed a training program which allowed people from the community to attend a six-week training session to learn all about the co-benefits of our energy work as it related to both human health and economic benefits. Our training yielded great results and helped these same individuals get hired locally. When we built the training program, we spoke with companies looking to hire in the EE industry. Companies told us they were not looking only for technical skill sets like the ability to use tools, climb ladders, enter basements and attics, but also softer skills, like educating home or building owners about upgrades and returns on investment. **In our work, we frequently find the need for training on the technical skill side or the soft skill side—and sometimes both. Either way, there is certainly a clear opportunity to train folks who are unemployed or underemployed, and leverage skill sets found in folks looking to transition to new careers like ours.**⁴

INDUSTRY DIVERSITY AND OUTREACH

It's clear that across America, there is a need to close workforce disparities as they relate to people of color, women, veterans, and other underrepresented populations, accessing career paths which are viable and offer longevity, as well as decent level of pay and benefits. That said,

³ <https://e4thefuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CONNECTICUT.pdf>.

⁴ https://www.eesi.org/files/Leticia_Colon_de_Mejias_093020.pdf

the energy efficiency (EE) and clean energy industry do offer all these things.⁵ I have staff that have worked for me for over 12 years. These staff came from underemployed or unemployed areas and in many cases, they had never worked in a technical job or even knew that energy efficiency and clean energy careers existed. Some of the staff who used to work for me, now own or manage businesses just like my own; and many of my past employees also now work in the Solar industry or other areas of the clean energy industry, managing staff, recruitment, performing sales roles, training, community engagement, or performing actual installations. There is certainly plenty of room for growth in this industry as we expand as a nation to meet our clean energy goals. These opportunities need to be communicated and training should be accessible.

We must continue to expand our outreach into populations that are underrepresented and underserved to ensure that communities of color gain access to Cradle to Career pathway support that would allow them access to these growing industries. Another way that we found success in engaging underrepresented populations in the Energy Efficiency careers programs and services and clean energy upgrades, is to reach out to educational programs, schools, and community centers and provide free educational tools that align with Next Generation Science Standards and Common Core Standards.⁶ Often, these communities and schools don't have access or support for energy, climate, and science education. Offering schools and communities free or low-cost educational tools and support allows access and opportunity for those communities to learn about these important topics; and this, in turn, helps them get engaged in the workforce. This approach is very successful and has overlapping benefits such as increased enrollment in energy saving programs and lowering energy bills.⁷

Robust investment in energy efficiency will create skilled jobs and stable career pathways with opportunities for growth in every state, not just for the moment, but for the long-term. With access to workforce development and training programs, struggling Americans can become fully equipped to fill existing jobs and new careers in this emerging clean energy economy. We are presented with an unprecedented opportunity to lift underserved communities by supporting displaced workers, and career changers, through recruitment and training for careers in energy efficiency. With expanded training we can connect displaced and transitioning workers, underrepresented populations, and historically disadvantaged populations to these job opportunities.

Along with expanded training, outreach and education are also vital. Despite energy being a necessity, most Americans don't understand where their energy comes from, or understand the interconnectedness of energy usage to our health and our economy. To help transition Americans into an energy efficiency and a clean energy economy, it is important for Americans to learn about energy, where it comes from, and what are the economic, social and health benefits and true costs.⁸

⁵ <https://www.eesi.org/briefings/view/093020workforce>

⁶ <https://www.gewportal.org/the-assembly-got-students-excited-about-saving-energy/>

⁷ <https://www.gewportal.org/green-eco-warriors-visit-oliver-ellsworth-elementary-school/>

⁸ https://efficiencyforall.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Indoor-Health-Barriers-v6_2-26-2021_rs.pdf

As the founder and Chair of the Green Eco Warriors, Inc., I have had the opportunity to create and share my understanding of the importance of energy, its impacts, and benefits through multiple mediums.

Green Eco Warriors is a Non-Profit Organization which provides sustainability education focused on Creating a Culture of Sustainable Thinkers™. Our goal is to educate and motivate youth and their families to reduce waste and lower carbon emissions through conservation-based education and behavioral changes. We provide live educational presentations and take-home tools which allow students to take the message and information on energy savings, conservation, stewardship, and agency home and to participate in civic engagement and STEAM based hands-on learning in the community.⁹

We have found that direct engagement through schools and community centers raises the understanding of these concepts rapidly. The key is to ensure the content is digestible and not too dense. We ensure our messaging and content is clear and motivating, calling people to direct actionable steps like signing up for a home energy solutions audit, as well as introducing them to our Switch It off, Save Energy & Save Dinero, and The Warrior Way programs.¹⁰

Our programs are targeted at school-age youth and families. We believe that by targeting youth as young as preschool students, we are building a culture of sustainable thinkers. We have also demonstrated that by using take-home tools, we can further extend the outreach to families and have a greater impact with less cost and lowered expenses to the programs and budgets.

Unlike commonly used take home trifold and flyers, families hold onto the educational books and magazines and share the messages embedded, which they then share with extended families and friends. Early exposure to STEM concepts, energy education, and civic engagement leads to investigational thinking bridging to problem solving skills and developing personal agency-based mindsets. Knowledge is power and it is our duty to empower all Americans with information that will help them succeed and help our nation thrive together as we transition to an affordable accessible clean energy economy.

FEDERAL SUPPORT FOR EE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The energy efficiency and clean energy industry has not received the support necessary to expand and diversify to meet critical goals of inclusion, equity, and diversity. We must take deliberate actions at the federal level to expose Americans to industry job opportunities. We could do this by providing federal support to energy efficiency and clean energy companies – which as mentioned earlier are largely small businesses – to hire and train new employees. We must create Workforce Development programs that are accessible, affordable, and offer short pathways to gaining access to these skilled careers. We should also create public service announcements that explain why we are converting to a clean energy economy, how important it is for human health, how important it is for our communities, and how it will change our world and our country for the better. Once we provide information and inform Americans on the value,

⁹ <https://www.gewportal.org/the-green-eco-warriors-were-enthusiastic-and-compelling/>

¹⁰ <https://www.gewportal.org/it-was-one-of-our-most-successful-fundraisers/>

importance, and opportunities that this plan offers, I know that people will become engaged.¹¹ People cannot know what they do not know, and the first step to gaining knowledge or growing, is awareness and exposure to the basic concepts.

To prepare more American workers for quality jobs in energy efficiency and bolster the economy, Congress must act to support workforce development and jobs training, by passing the **Blue Collar to Green Collar Jobs Development Act (H.R. 156, 117th Congress, sponsored by Chairman Rush)**. The bill includes a crucial **Energy Workforce Grant Program** that small businesses can apply to directly to help them hire and train new workers as opposed to going through labor organizations or registered apprenticeship programs that do not exist for the home performance industry and often perpetuate diversity disparities. I urge Congress to support this type of direct support to make an immediate difference for our industry.

Small businesses like mine are the backbone of the efficiency industry, and we need assistance to help train our new hires and provide ongoing education to existing employees. The **Blue Collar to Green Collar Jobs Act** would provide direct support to small businesses with a focus on disadvantaged communities and ensure there are qualified workers to fill these vital American jobs. With access to workforce development and robust short-term training programs, struggling Americans can become fully equipped to fill existing jobs and new careers in this emerging clean energy economy. It would allow workers to expand their skill set, earn higher wages, and provide improved services and technologies. Importantly, the legislation would give priority to businesses that recruit employees from local communities, minorities, women, veterans, and workers transitioning from fossil fuel sector jobs - and it would also support critical on-the-job training and reskilling for these workers. The bill was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in the 116th Congress as part of H.R. 2 and H.R. 4447.

Congress can take immediate action to support nationwide investments in residential energy efficiency that help American families save money on their energy bills and improve their quality of life, while also creating local jobs and boosting small business and economic opportunity. The **HOPE for HOMES Act of 2021 (H.R. 3456, S.1768)** helps to support contractors and provide homeowner rebates for energy efficiency home upgrades, including enhanced support for moderate-income and working families that do not qualify for weatherization assistance.

HOPE would be paired with a \$8.4 billion **Home Owner Managing Savings (HOMES) rebate program**, to be authorized through 2027 (or until expended). The HOMES program would provide rebates to homeowners and multifamily property owners who undertake energy efficiency home retrofits, thereby supporting contractor small businesses who are providing energy efficiency products and installations for their customers. It would also create a vital stimulus – encouraging property owners to undertake energy retrofits and driving demand for these highly trained workers. This will result in the creation of local jobs that cannot be outsourced, and a massive upgrade to this nation’s residential housing stock.

We must also ensure that funds and activities to support energy efficiency workforce development are accessible to small businesses and include flexibility to use funds for on-

¹¹ <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/8769208179771457807>

the-job training. There is no Department of Labor code for energy efficiency, so it has been very difficult to access federal and state funds for energy efficiency apprenticeship programs, particularly in the residential sector. The Department of Energy has a much better understanding of this industry and its support for residential energy efficiency businesses is crucial.

There is also a need for continuing education, because these industries change rapidly, and oftentimes small businesses are left behind. Too often, I've seen small businesses train workers, only to see them leave to work at larger businesses like electric generation companies or ESCOs. In my experience, continued Workforce Development on-site marks an excellent way to retain talent. Small businesses need support for continued Workforce Development so that we can continue to grow, pay taxes, and add value to the communities that we serve.

Through my work at Efficiency for All, we have developed customizable, stackable, and scalable workforce development programs and educational tools that will provide individuals the technical and soft skills needed to begin a new career in the energy efficiency field.

Efficiency for All is currently conducting a 6-week workforce program with our Governor's Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS) and Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) for 10 individuals. These individuals will receive the soft skill training and Building Performance Institute (BPI) certifications in building science required to be employed as a BPI Lead Technician in the Home Energy Solutions program in Connecticut. The workforce program will place these individuals in a six-week on-the-job (OJT) positions with local energy efficiency contractors for hands-on experience and an opportunity to be hired directly thereafter. Once these individuals successfully complete this program, they will qualify for open positions that are in high demand and provide them the opportunity to earn between \$35,000.00 to \$60,000.00 annually.¹² These career paths also provide retirement, insurance, paid time off, and other important social benefits.

CONCLUSION

I believe that the time to diversify our clean energy workforce is now. Most of my staff come from at-risk and underserved populations, but that has not held us back. We have continued to grow, all while supporting the communities we came from because our work can help everyone. The sooner we educate our communities on how to draw-down energy demands and how we can ramp up clean energy resources, the better off we will all be. As a proud American and small business owner, I know that together we can create a responsible path forward to ensure an inclusive transition to a clean, resilient, reliable, affordable, accessible, clean energy economy, which will benefit all Americans regardless of economics or social standing.

You can learn more about the importance of Energy Efficiency at www.encyforall.org, and about our successful projects drawing down energy demand and creating career paths at www.eesgogreen.com. Visit www.greenecowarriors.org to find information about Cradle to Career and supporting materials that engage minorities and communities of color.

¹² <https://www.eesi.org/briefings/view/093020workforce>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Dinero the Frog Learns to Save Energy - by Leticia Colon de Mejias, \(Illustrator\) Tamara Visco](#) *Dinero the Frog Learns to Save Energy* is a fun and educational book regarding energy conservation and how changing simple habits and behaviors can protect the environment. Poppi™ the Frog, teaches his grandson Dinero about energy, how we use electricity, what renewable and non-renewable energy sources are, and how we can make smart energy-saving choices. This book aligns with the following Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS): NGSS-K-ESS3-3, NGSS-4-ESS3-1, and NGSS-5-ESS3-1 and the following Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.8, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.4, and CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.8. Additionally, Green Eco Warriors has aligned *Dinero the Frog Learns to Save Energy* with 2010 Science Curriculum & Assessment Expectations and 2015 Social Studies Frameworks. ISBN: 9780982216897, Date Published: 03/17/2013

[Defeating the Phantom Draw by Leticia Colon de Mejias, Casey Dilzer \(Illustrator\), Rebecca Meyer \(Editor\)](#) *Defeating the Phantom Draw* is a fun and educational book about where electricity comes from and how we can use our minds and actions to make choices that save energy and defeat the Phantom Draw. This book aligns with the following Next Generation Science Standards: 4-PS3-2, 4-PS3-4, 4-ESS3-1 and 5-ESS3-1. ISBN: 9780989336451, Date Published: 11/26/2014

[Green Eco Warriors - The Beginning, Issue 1.](#) The comic book series starts with the introduction of another superhero, Cambio (Spanish for change). Cambio locates future Green Eco Warriors: Amelia, Juan, Kalil, Liam and Nya at their school and informs them that they each have superpowers that can help protect the earth. The villains Mr. Big Corp, the Meddler, and the Phantom Draw make their debut too, with the hope of stopping Cambio and the Green Eco Warriors. ISBN: 9780989336420, Date Published: 04/27/2014

[Green Eco Warriors: Defeating the Phantom Draw, Issue 2.](#) Leticia Colon de Mejias, Casey Dilzer, Shawn Brewery Issue No. 2 finds Cambio teaching Amelia, Juan, Kalil, Liam, and Nya (the Green Eco Warriors) about phantom power and the evil Phantom Draw. Will the Green Eco Warriors be able to work together as a team and use their superpowers (brains and actions) to save the environment and defeat the Phantom Draw? ISBN: 9780989336444, Date Published: 09/11/2014

[Green Eco Warriors - The way of the warrior! Issue 3.](#) Issue No. 3 finds Dinero teaching Amelia, Juan, Kalil, Liam, and Nya (the Green Eco Warriors) about the way of the warrior and how he met Cambio. We also learn who Dinero is and where he comes from. What will the Green Eco Warriors learn about next? How will they be able to share the message of conservation and change with the world? Will they be able to help people change in time to save the planet from destruction and the evil powers of Mr. Big Corp and his flunkies? ISBN: 9780989336475, Date Published: 04/06/2015

Addressing Health and Affordability Challenges for Low-Income Families, EFA (March 2021)

<https://efficiencyforall.org/wordpress/2021/03/01/addressing-health-and-affordability-challenges-for-low-income-families/>

Green Eco Warriors Magazine This publication aligns with Next Generation Science Standards (4-ESS3-1, 4-ESS3-2) and CMT Science Standards (4.2 B.11) for grade 4.

Health and Safety Barriers to Weatherization Study (Yale, March 2017)

<https://efficiencyforall.org/wordpress/2020/08/15/health-and-safety-barriers-to-weatherization-study/>

Home Energy Affordability in Connecticut: The Affordability Gap (2017)

<https://efficiencyforall.org/wordpress/2019/01/23/home-energy-affordability-in-connecticut-the-affordability-gap-2017/>

Saving Energy, Saving Lives: The Health Impacts of Avoiding Power Plant Pollution with Energy Efficiency (February 2018)

<https://efficiencyforall.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/h1801.pdf>

Energy Efficiency in Connecticut (April 2017)

https://efficiencyforall.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/EE-2_13-Slides-2.pdf

EESI Briefings Sept 30, 2021, Low-Carbon Small Business and Post-COVID Recovery Briefing Series: Workforce Wednesdays

<https://www.eesi.org/briefings/view/093020workforce>

June 24 2021 National DOE Better Buildings State of the Covid Economy

<https://attendeegotowebinar.com/recording/8769208179771457807>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8j-YJdbWZY&t=247s>

GC3 and Energy Equity Work <https://efficiencyforall.org/wordpress/2020/02/25/governors-council-on-climate-change-gc3-equity-lens/>

https://efficiencyforall.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/EE-Health_2-18-2019_Flyer.pdf

https://efficiencyforall.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Indoor-Health-Barriers-v6_2-26-2021_rs.pdf

<https://efficiencyforall.org/wordpress/2020/11/22/addressing-health-safety-barriers-in-ct/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8j-YJdbWZY&t=247s>

Solve Climate 2030- International Presentation Video

<https://efficiencyforall.org/wordpress/2020/04/07/an-affordable-way-forward-energy-efficiency/>

https://youtu.be/1_7MUIDb2E0

Creating a Culture of Sustainable Thinkers™ supportive links to learning more

www.gewportal.org

[Green Eco Warriors--Who We Are, https://www.gewportal.org/magazine/](https://www.gewportal.org/magazine/)

[Story Time with Leticia Colon de Mejias, https://www.gewportal.org/story-time-with-leticia-colon-de-mejias/](https://www.gewportal.org/story-time-with-leticia-colon-de-mejias/)

[Green Eco Warriors - Dinero the Frog Learns to Save Energy Video,](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOaMWYgWmX4)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOaMWYgWmX4>

[Low-Carbon Small Business and Post-COVID Recovery,](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8j-YJdbWZY&t=247s)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8j-YJdbWZY&t=247s>

[Invest in Energy Efficiency to Create Local Jobs & Restart the Economy,](https://www.eesi.org/files/Leticia_Colon_de_Mejias_093020.pdf)

https://www.eesi.org/files/Leticia_Colon_de_Mejias_093020.pdf