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Energy burden sounds bad and it is; it's how much of your household income goes for your energy bills. For low income households, the average national energy burden is almost three times higher than that of other households.

Why are energy bills higher for more vulnerable Kansas families? Many low income people live in rental housing and landlords have no incentive to invest on energy efficiency if their tenants are paying those bills. Tenants can't afford to invest in energy upgrades for buildings they don't own and don't have the luxury of buying the most energy efficient appliances. Energy and other utilities make money on the amount of power they sell, not the power their customers conserve. These dynamics lead to a lot of waste and expense for the most vulnerable Kansas families.

We can work toward energy justice by closing the gap on the energy burdens often heaviest in historically underfunded communities of color like those in Wichita, Topeka, and Kansas City, Kansas. Kansas is one of the highest energy burdened states in the Midwest. Nearly 25% of Kansas households must choose between paying their energy bills or fulfilling other basic household needs.

Policymakers and utility leaders can make a difference by ramping up investments in low-income housing retrofits, energy efficiency, community solar, and weatherization. Communities should be part of the process to design energy programs and provide feedback on how programs can be improved. Citizen participation will maximize the benefits of these programs. We can learn from cities throughout the country which have engaged in this process.

“Ain't no power like the power of the people 'cause the power of the people don't stop!”

Be one of the people. Get involved and help us build the people power we need to eliminate energy burdens throughout Kansas. Contact Ty Gorman at ty.gorman@sierraclub.org.

