

## **Energy Justice in Virginia**

### ***Why We Need to Invest in Energy Efficiency***

Burning fossil fuels like coal, oil, and fracked-gas exacerbates injustices in Virginia and beyond. The communities that are least responsible for causing the climate crisis are worst hit by its impacts. At the same time, fossil fuel pollution disproportionately harms the health of low-income families and people of color. Finally, in Virginia, these same communities face high energy burdens, meaning that a disproportionate amount of their income goes towards energy bills. To begin to correct these injustices and tackle the intersectional issues of energy, climate justice, and health, Virginia must invest in energy efficiency. There is no climate justice without energy justice.

### **Fossil Fuels Harm Public Health**

Climate change is not a far-away concept that may impact us eventually. It is impacting Virginians and harming public health right now. High fossil fuel pollution rates are linked to increased asthma attacks, developmental delays in children, strokes, heart attacks, dementia in older adults, and lung cancer. Other severe health impacts caused or exacerbated by a warming and variable climate include an increase in heatstroke and heat-related heart attacks, as well as an increase in infectious diseases carried by mosquitoes and ticks.<sup>1</sup>



Everyone in Virginia is impacted by fossil fuel pollution, but poor communities and communities of color often face the brunt of it. These communities often are hit hardest by hurricanes and floods because they do not have as many financial resources to prepare or recover. Polluting industries and fossil fuel facilities also are much more likely to be sited closer to or within these same neighborhoods. Data shows us that communities of color, especially black and latino communities, have higher exposure rates to air pollution than other identities.<sup>2</sup> Nearly 70 percent of black communities in the U.S. live within 30 miles of a coal-powered power plant, a rate that is 75% higher than the U.S. as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

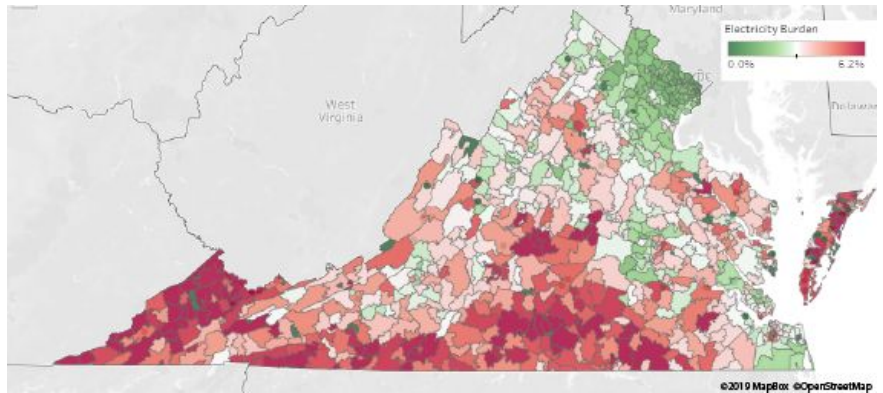
### **In Virginia, Everyone Has A High “Energy Burden” Thanks to Dominion**

“Energy burden” is the percentage of household income spent on home energy bills. Those with a high energy burden spend a greater proportion of their income on utilities than the average family. Virginians pay more for their electricity than the average resident in the country, and this burden is greater in low-income communities.<sup>4</sup>

According to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), Virginia has the 10th highest average residential electricity bills in the country. This alarming statistic is made even more concerning by

the State Corporation Commission's recent findings that Virginia's largest power provider, Dominion Energy, collected an excess of \$277 million in profits in 2018 alone, which resulted in the average electricity consumer paying an extra \$113 in unnecessary bills to Dominion that same year.<sup>5</sup>

The disparities become even more stark when you examine the facts on a regional level. Nationwide, an average of 6% or below for your entire energy burden is considered "affordable." With only one-quarter of Virginia's zip codes experiencing a rate below 6.0%, Virginia's electricity burden is unaffordable for over 75% of households.<sup>4</sup>



The energy burden is a known contributing factor to evictions. Families with limited income are sometimes forced to choose between paying their electric bill or paying the rent.<sup>6</sup> For example, Richmond has one of the highest eviction rates in the country – and one of the highest energy burdens.

## Virginia Needs to Invest in Energy Efficiency.

Ultimately, we want to build clean energy solutions that will not only tackle the climate crisis, but ensure that ALL communities, especially those most vulnerable to the impact of the crisis, reap the benefits and investments of solving it. Energy efficiency investments are a key ingredient: improving energy efficiency at power plants, improving insulation in homes to prevent energy waste, investing in more efficient appliances and lighting, and behavior-based programs to reduce energy use are all solutions that cut carbon and help residents and business owners save on monthly bills.<sup>7</sup> This is a much needed step to close the gaps and help Virginia families thrive.

### Take Action: Help Virginia achieve energy justice!

With our goal of passing a 100% clean energy and efficiency standard in Virginia, Virginians would benefit from the inevitable lowering of electricity prices by creating more energy efficient power sources, reducing overall energy demand in the state. It would also provide millions in efficiency investments. This, in turn, will help reduce the energy burden by lowering the cost of electricity for the average household.

Sign our petition: [bit.ly/100-va](https://bit.ly/100-va)

For references, please visit: <https://chesapeakeclimate.org/virginia/safe-coast/>

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