



**SEEA**  
SOUTHEAST ENERGY EFFICIENCY ALLIANCE

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# Energy Insecurity Working Groups Launch

Wednesday, March 27<sup>th</sup> 3 – 4 pm ET

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# Agenda

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- Housekeeping & Introduction
- Context of Energy Insecurity in the Southeast
- Project Background
- Overview of the Three Working Groups
- Working Group Participation & Equity Alignment
- Q&A and Next Steps

## OUR MISSION

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To optimize the use and impact of energy to enhance the quality of life in the Southeast.

## OUR VISION

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All people in the Southeast live and work in healthy and resilient buildings, utilize clean and affordable transportation, and thrive in a robust and equitable economy.

## OUR VALUES

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### Take Initiative

We take responsibility for realizing a better quality of life in the Southeast.



### Earn Trust

We pursue our work with benevolence, competence, and reliability.



### Value Others

We seek, respect, and promote diverse perspectives.



### Pursue Equitable Solutions

We recognize, acknowledge, and account for a history of prejudice and inequality in Southeastern communities.

# OUR CORE SERVICES

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**Research**



**Facilitation**



**Consultation &  
Education**



**Program  
Management &  
Financial Services**

# Energy Insecurity in the Southeast

Chris Woolery

# HealthAffairs.org, June 2023

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ADVANCED SEARCH

HEALTH POLICY BRIEF | CULTURE OF HEALTH

## Energy Insecurity And Health: America's Hidden Hardship

[Diana Hernández](#)

Energy insecurity can have important implications for health and health equity. Many long-standing programs to address energy insecurity need to be refreshed in light of climate change, the recognition of unacceptable disparities, and the impending transition to clean energy.

JUNE 29, 2023

10.1377/hpb20230518.472953



### SUPPORTER(S)



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DOI: 10.1377/hpb20230518.472953

# Center on Global Energy Policy, October 2023

Energy Justice

## Energy Insecurity in the United States

Fact Sheet by Diana Hernandez, Qëndresa Krasniqi & Alexandra Peek - October 26, 2023

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energy Insecurity

United States

### What is Energy Insecurity?

Energy insecurity (EI) is defined as the inability to adequately meet household energy needs.

EI has three dimensions:<sup>[1]</sup>

1. **Economic.** A disproportionate share of household income is allocated to utility expenses (i.e., energy burden).
2. **Physical.** Housing deficiencies and inefficiencies impact thermal comfort, induce harmful environmental exposure, and/or increase energy costs.
3. **Coping.** Households use adaptive strategies to manage and cope with the physical and economic hardships associated with EI.

### Meet the Experts

Experts

**Diana Hernandez**

Managing Director of Domestic Programs, Energy...

Energy Justice

Energy & Public Health



## 3: Columbia University, June 2023

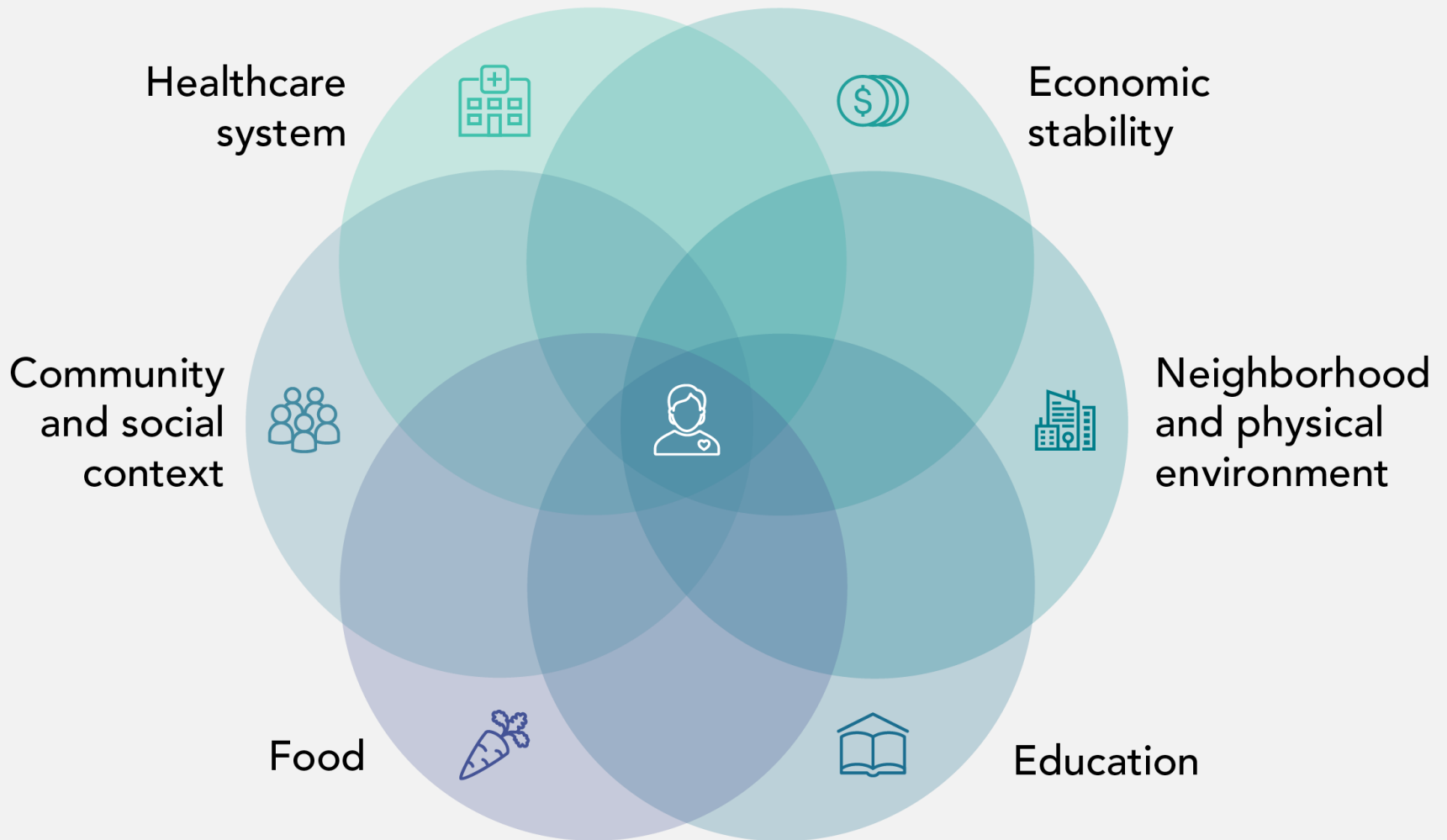


### Energy Insecurity Is Underappreciated Social and Environmental Determinant of Health

—  
The clean energy economy is out of reach for  
many households



# SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH



# HealthAffairs.org, June 2023

## Health Policy Brief



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### KEY POINTS:

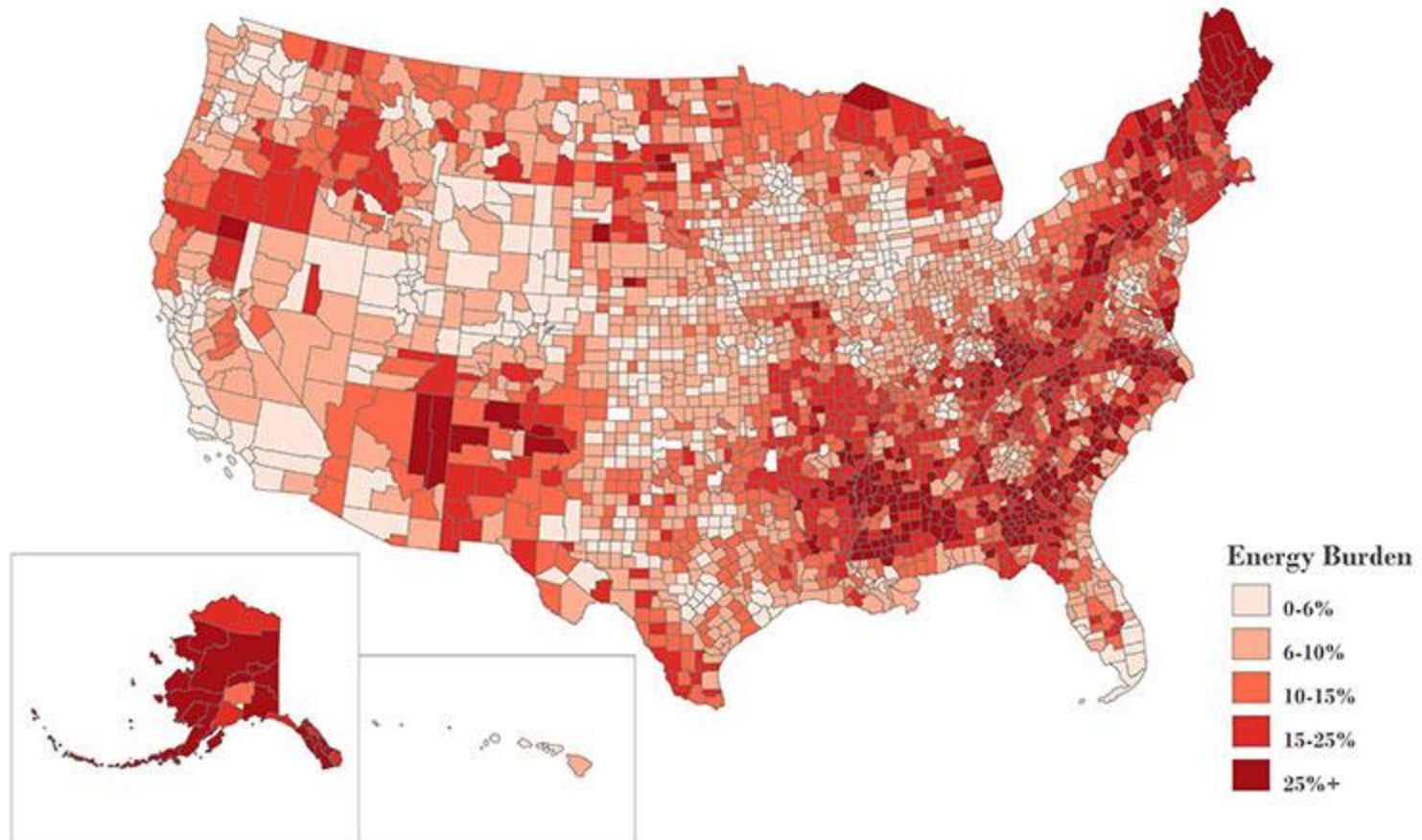
- More than thirty million US households are energy insecure, meaning that they are unable to adequately meet household energy needs.
- Low-income households and those comprising Black, Indigenous, and people of color are disproportionately affected by energy insecurity.
- Structural racism, poor housing conditions, inflation, climate change, and the clean energy transition contribute to and exacerbate energy insecurity.
- Energy insecurity adversely affects physical and mental health and can be fatal.
- Policy and programmatic solutions exist to reduce and eliminate energy insecurity.

## Prevalence

Among all US households in 2020, 33.53 million experienced some form of EI. More specifically<sup>[2]</sup>

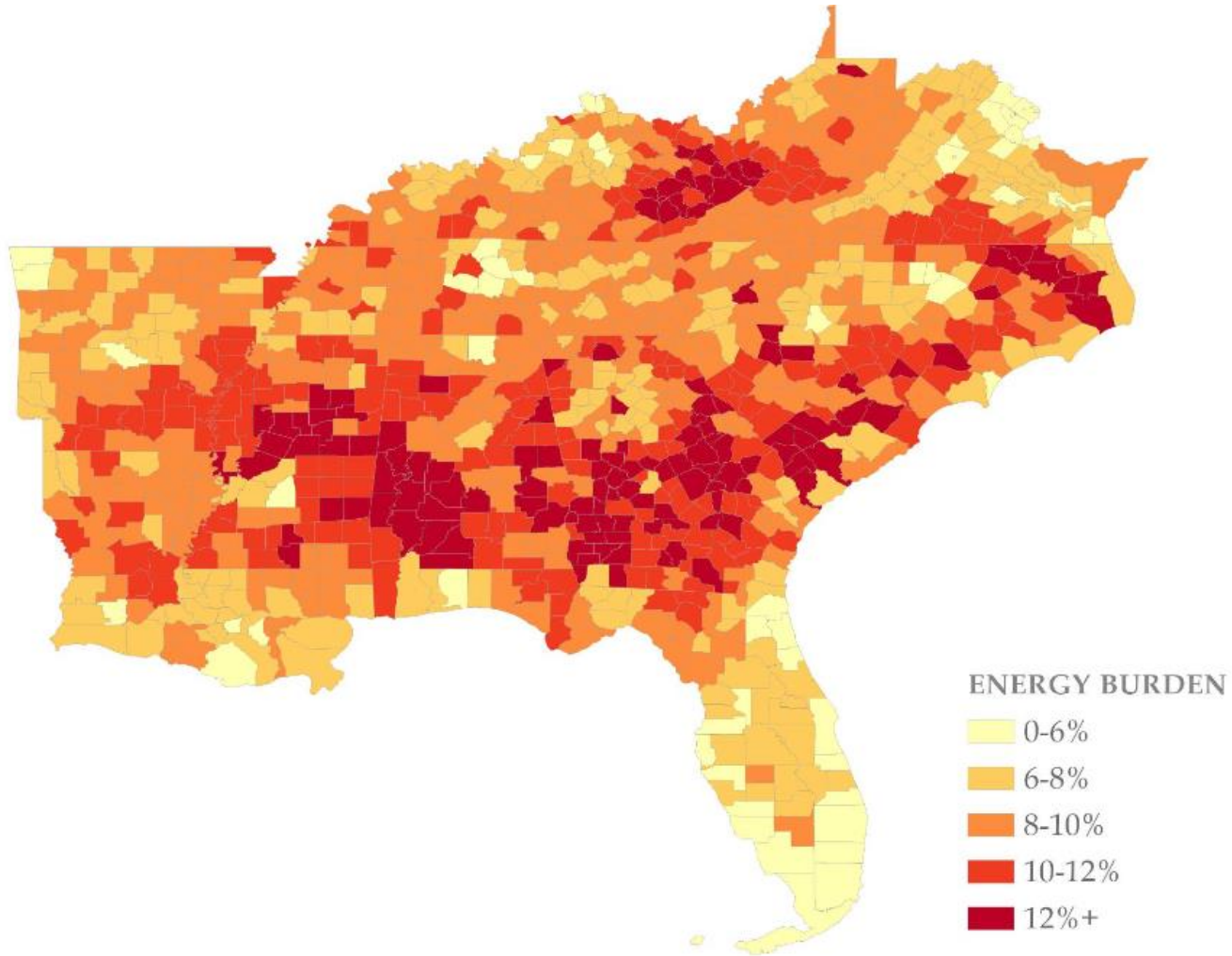
- 24.61 million reduced or went without food or medicine to pay energy costs.
- 12.36 million received disconnection notices.
- 6.03 million were unable to use an air-conditioner.<sup>[3]</sup>
- 12.20 million left their homes at unhealthy temperatures to avert high energy bills.
- 5.08 million were unable to use heating equipment.<sup>[4]</sup>

# National energy burden distribution, SEEA 2021



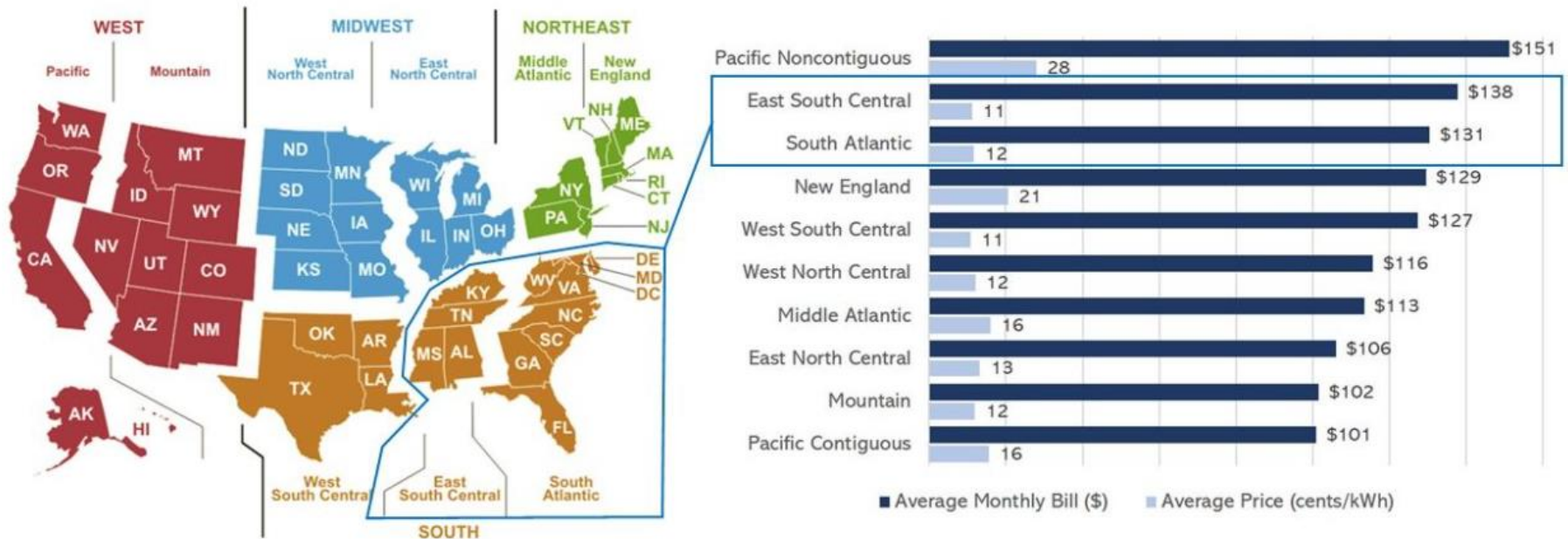
# Energy Insecurity in the Southeast, SEEA 2023

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# Energy Insecurity in the Southeast, SEEA 2023

The Southeast has the lowest energy rates in the contiguous United States, but the highest residential utility bills.



Data: Energy Information Agency (EIA), 2015 Residential Energy Consumption Survey (RECS). Map: EIA. Chart: William D. Bryan.

# Energy Insecurity in the Southeast, SEEA 2023

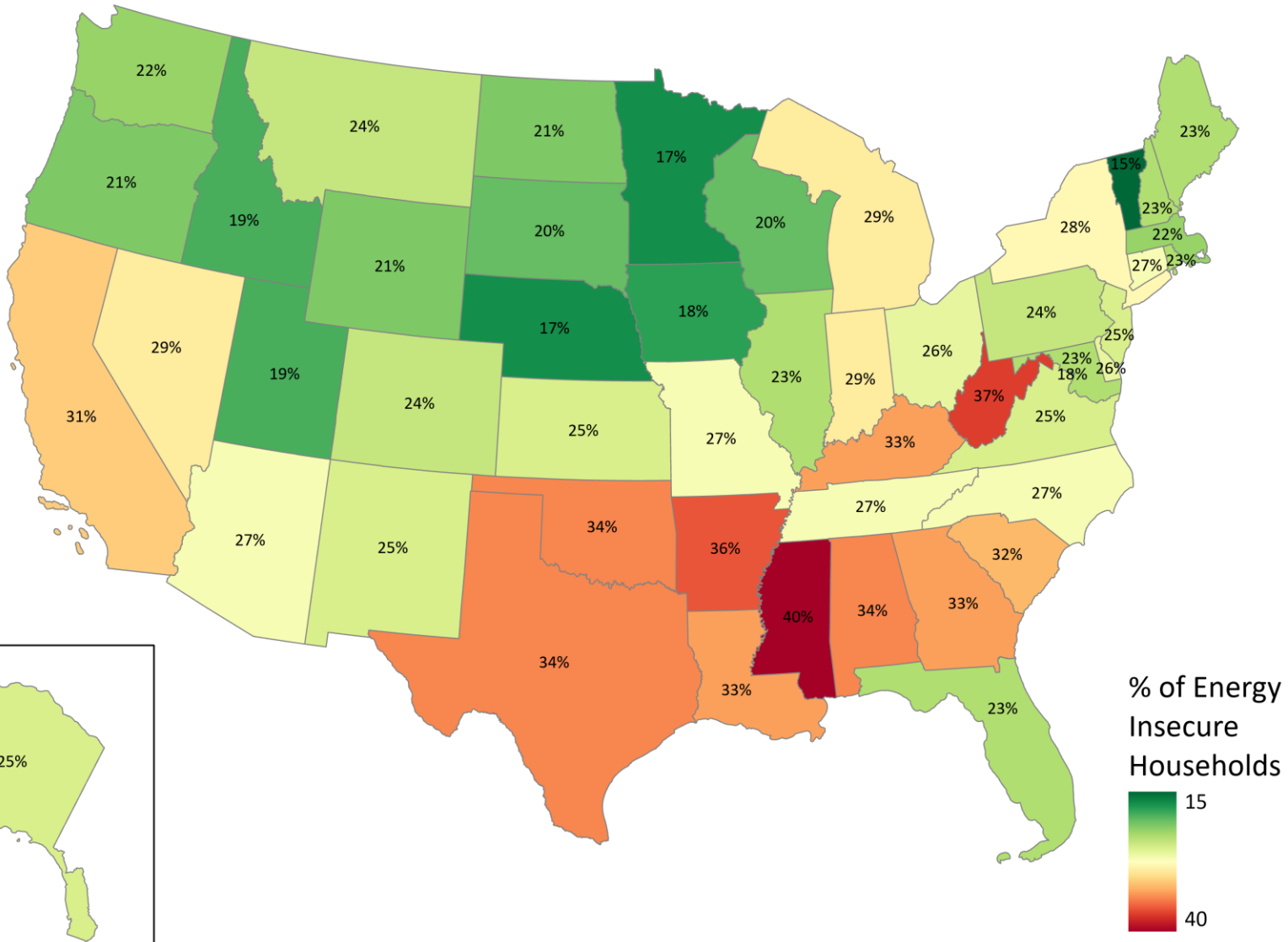
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- **Only 67 counties out of more than 1,000 in the Southeast have an average energy burden that is deemed affordable** for low-income households, while 941 have energy burdens that meet or exceed the widely-used 6% affordability threshold.
- 15.4 million households in the South (35% of all households) report experiencing any energy insecurity, the most of any region in the United States.
- One out of three people in the South struggles to pay their bills month to month.
- **7.5 million households in the South (17% of all) are estimated to have received disconnection or stop service notices**, and paying utility bills is one of the leading reasons people take out exploitative high-interest payday loans.

# Energy insecurity is most acute in the South



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% of Energy Insecure Households





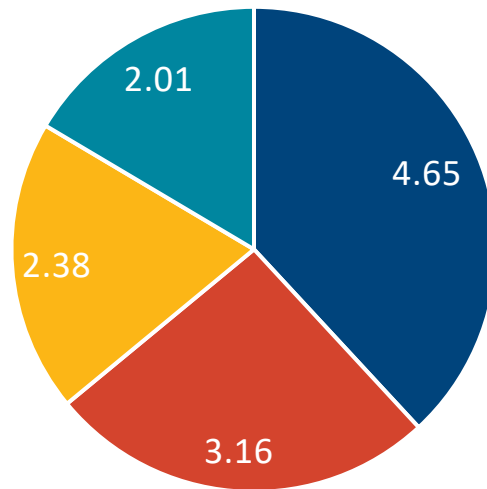
Energy insecurity was common in the South, even before COVID-19.

The **dark blue** section in these pie charts demonstrates the need among Southern households (millions of households.)

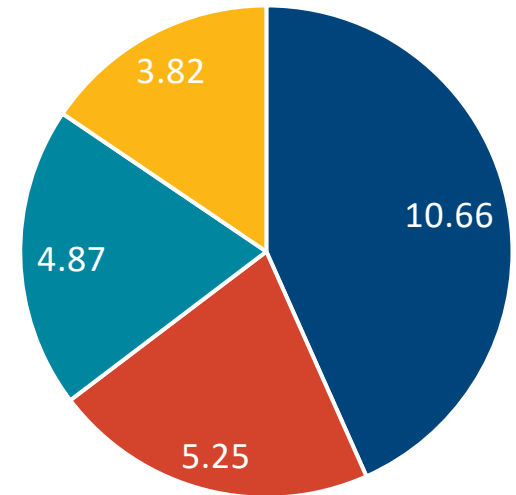
- South
- West
- Midwest
- Northeast



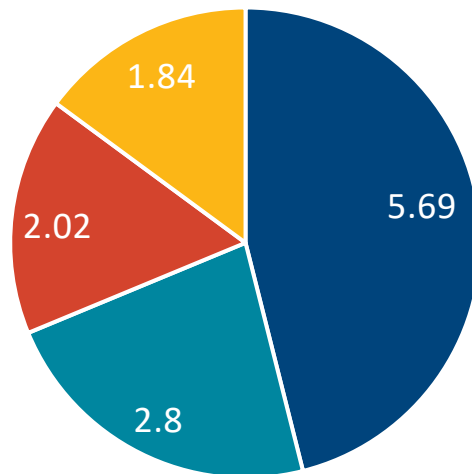
Home at Unhealthy Temperature



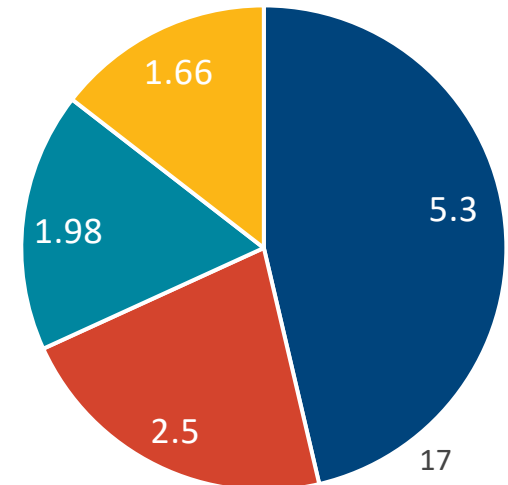
Reduce Food/Medicine



Disconnected/Stop Service Notice



Unable To Use Heat/Cooling Equipment



Data: U.S. Energy Information Agency (EIA), Residential Energy Consumption Survey (RECS)

# Lights Out In The Cold, NAACP 2017

## THE RIGHT TO UNINTERRUPTED ENERGY SERVICE

The establishment of a universal **right to uninterrupted energy service** would ensure that provisions are in place to prevent utility disconnection due to non-payment and arrearages.<sup>3</sup> Toward establishing such a right, we call for all utility companies to advocate for and incorporate the following foundational principles into their models, operations, and policies:

1. Secure **ACCESS** to utility services for all households;
2. Ensure **INCLUSION** of all customers in the development of utility policies and regulations;
3. Create full **TRANSPARENCY** of the information and actions of utility companies, regulating bodies, legislatures, and utility affiliated organizations;
4. Guarantee the **PROTECTION** of the human and civil rights of all customers; and
5. Advance programs that help **ELIMINATE POVERTY**, so that all customers can pay utility bills.



# Utility Service As a Human Right, NCLC 2021



National  
Consumer Law  
Center



## Implementing a Roadmap to Utility Service as a Human Right

# Utility Service As a Human Right, NCLC 2021

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## Obligations of State Policy Makers and Regulators, Publicly Owned Utility Providers, and Cooperative Boards

- Ensuring safe, reliable, and affordable universal utility service must be prioritized.
- State laws, including those that direct the actions of public utility commissions and non-commission-regulated utilities, should explicitly recognize that utility service is essential to public health and safety, and that no customer should be disconnected based on the inability to afford essential utility service.
- The cost of utility service should be based on a customer's income and ability to pay, through the use of equitably funded Percentage of Income Payment Plans (PIPP) for economically disadvantaged customers, which set rates for energy and water rates at an affordable level based on a person's income, and/or tiered discount rates, which provide significant discounts for income-eligible customers relative to their income level.
- Arrearage forgiveness programs for economically disadvantaged customers who make affordable, consistent monthly payments must be universally available in all states, with arrearages forgiven after 12 months of current bill payments, with allowances for occasional late or missed payments within a designated time period.
- Customers must have an opportunity to catch up when they fall behind on monthly utility bills, their participation in PIPP programs, Arrearage Management Programs (AMPs) and payment plans/deferred payment arrangements (DPAs), and should not be automatically terminated due to late payment. Customers who miss payments should be allowed to seek reinstatement under reasonable rules that reflect the customer's ability to pay.
- Disconnections based on inability to pay for low-income households must be eliminated – not just reduced – to ensure access to essential utility service.

# Utility Service As a Human Right, NCLC 2021

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## Obligations of Consumer Advocates

- State consumer advocates should create coalitions with community organizations working for policy change as partners in utility proceedings so the voices of those most impacted by utility credit and collection policies can be regularly heard.
- Consumer advocates should include, within their assessment of the justness and reasonableness of utility rates, an examination of how rate proposals impact low-income customers.
- Consumer advocates should embrace the potential for energy- and water-efficiency programs to lower customer bills, and advocate for program offerings and performance metrics to ensure that low-income customers directly benefit from on-premise efficiency improvements.
- Consumer advocates should monitor and assess utilities' credit and collections policies to ensure that customers are not being disconnected for inability to pay, and that those policies are not disproportionately impacting communities of color.

# Background on the Southeast Energy Insecurity Project

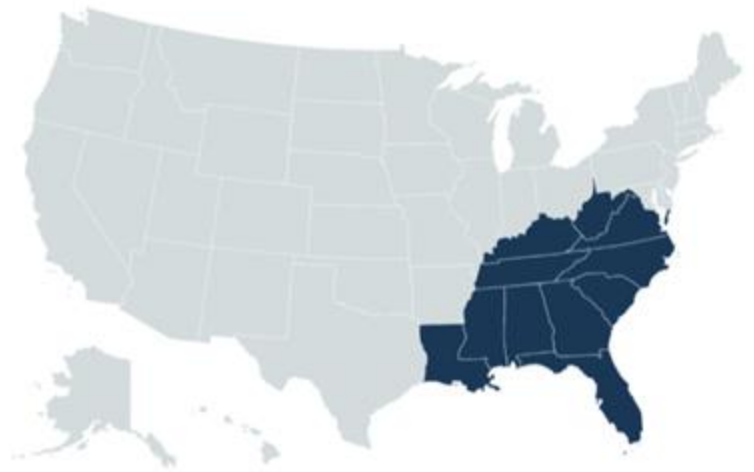
Will Bryan

# Where Have We Been?

## Origins of the Southeast Energy Insecurity Project

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- ★ Measure and characterize the causes and impacts of energy burden and insecurity in the Southeast
- ★ Devise regional, sustainable solutions to addressing southeastern energy insecurity
- ★ Foster regional collaboration amongst leaders in the energy insecurity, efficiency, and equity spaces



## Energy Utilities – IOUs and Cooperatives



**Dominion Energy**



## Local, State & Federal Agencies



## NGOs and Consumer Groups



## Financial Institutions

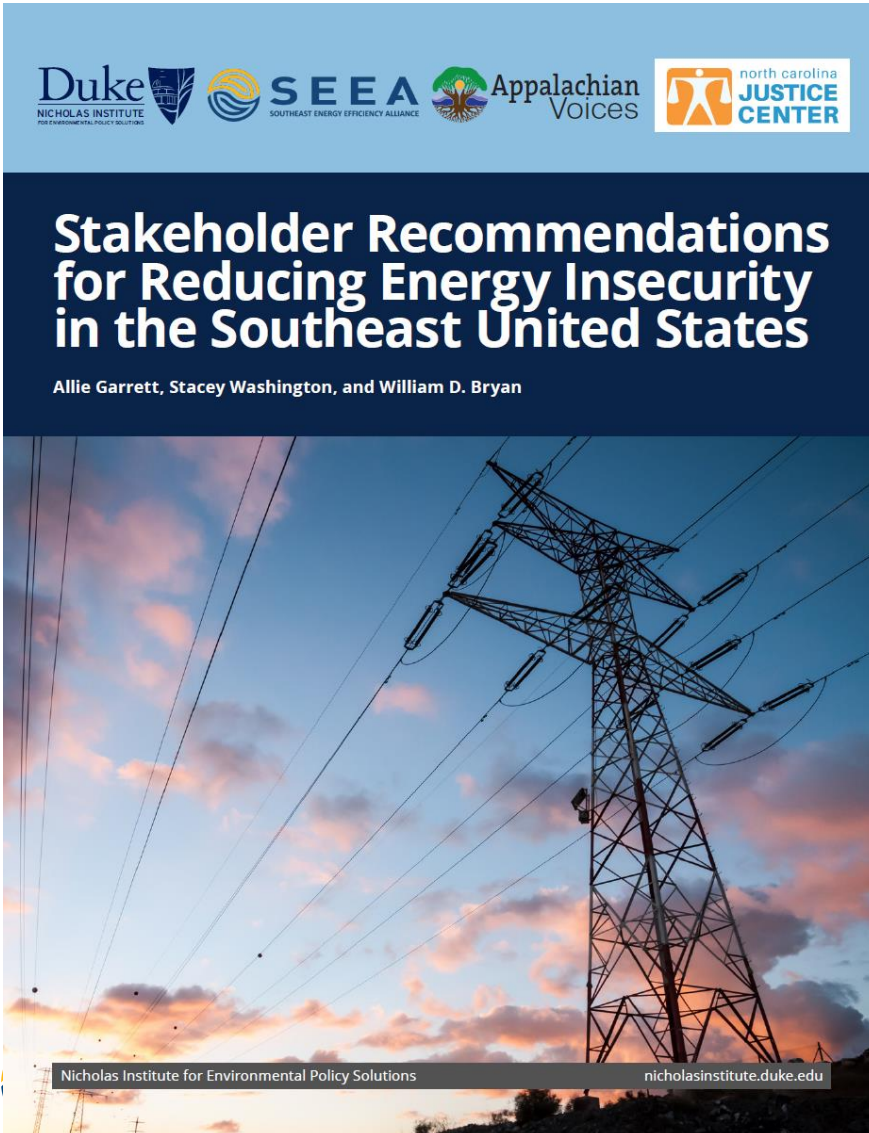


**VPLC**  
Virginia Poverty  
Law Center





# Recommendations for mitigating energy insecurity in the Southeast



## Working Groups

- Systemic Change
- Housing
- Awareness and Community Engagement
- Data Access and Improvement
- Programs and Access to Financing
- Utility Solutions

# Webinar Series

- To promote engagement around best practices for mitigating energy insecurity
- Featuring Suma Consulting, Gullah Geechee Chamber of Commerce, Solar Energy Loan Fund (SELF), Duke Energy, Clean Energy Group, the P.E.E.R. Group, & the North Carolina Sustainable Energy Association (NCSEA)



# Energy Insecurity Implementation Awards

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- Focused on expanding access to, and participation in, Georgia Power’s income-qualified energy efficiency program that provides free upgrades to qualifying households
- Hosted education sessions and served as case managers for households in navigating the process
- The team collected data on barriers to participation which were shared with the Georgia Public Service Commission’s Demand Side Management Working Group, which advises both the commission and Georgia Power on existing and future energy efficiency programs, with the goal of lowering participation barriers for customers

# Energy Insecurity Implementation Awards

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- Project to identify and address health and safety challenges that prevent access to energy assistance
- Launch an awareness campaign to educate energy insecure communities and decision-makers
- This project is focused on four underserved communities in North Charleston, SC that have a high number of aging homes and high energy burdens.

This project developed a program that identifies homes that need repairs before they can receive weatherization upgrades. Project partners and AmeriCorps staff supported raising community awareness and outreach.

# The Next Phase: SEIP Policy Working Groups

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## *Moving from recommendations to implementation*

Working groups are designed to make the original recommendations actionable and support ongoing regional efforts. To this end, working groups will:

- Understand where work is already being done to reduce energy insecurity
- Understand successful program and/or policy models that work in Southern communities
- Identify new opportunities for extending this work
- Provide support for ongoing efforts
- Develop a plan to implement these solutions

The initial slate of working groups will focus on three areas:

- Awareness and Community Engagement
- Data Access and Improvement
- Utility Solutions

# Presentation of the Working Groups

Leadership Forum Leads

# Awareness and Community Engagement Team



Stacey Washington  
Deputy Director, SC Energy Office



Ashley McBride  
Director of Policy, SEEA



Laura Diaz-Villaquiran  
Research Associate, SEEA

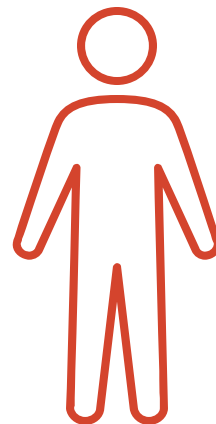
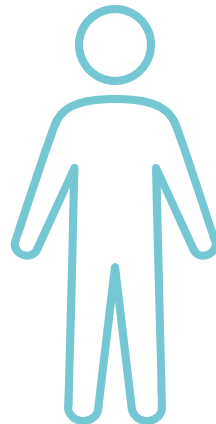
# Awareness and Community Engagement

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Develop a public-facing one-stop shop that outlines which programs individuals are eligible for, houses a centralized application for aid, and provides collaborative program implementation

Develop a database of programs addressing energy insecurity in the Southeast

Develop one centralized application for aid starting with weatherization and urgent repairs





# Utility Solutions Team



Chris Woolery  
Energy Projects  
Coordinator, Mountain  
Association



Claire Williamson  
Senior Energy Policy  
Advocate, NC Justice  
Center



Will Bryan  
Director of Research, SEEA



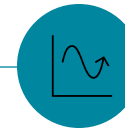
Lily Smith  
Program Associate, SEEA

# Utility Solutions

Implement strong procedural protections, seasonal shutoff moratoria, protections for the socially vulnerable, and payment assistance programs to prevent disconnection from essential utility service



Implement inclusive energy efficiency utility investments with robust consumer protections, such as Pay as You Save (PAYS)



Reduce future capacity needs through aggressive pursuit of energy efficiency and peak demand reduction

# Data Access and Improvement Team



Erin Rose  
Co-Founder & VP, Three<sup>3</sup>



Carmen Bingham  
Project Coordinator, VPLC



Will Bryan  
Director of Research, SEEA



Grace Parker  
Research Associate, SEEA

# Data Access and Improvement

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Require electric and gas utilities to collect, track, and reported detailed data such as arrearages, late fees, and shut-offs



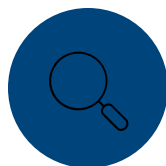
Develop a “data dictionary” to facilitate data requests for uses addressing energy insecurity



Establish data-sharing programs and develop a standard practice manual to guide/govern how data will be shared, what information can be shared, and how will it be used



Develop a process for community participation in identifying energy insecurity data needs



Require utility data collection in identifying energy insecurity data needs

# Working Group Participation & Equity Alignment

Will Bryan

# What Does it Mean to Participate?

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- **Why Participate?:** To engage with diverse stakeholders across the region and strategize around policy opportunities to reduce energy insecurity and support energy equity! Participants will be equipped with the knowledge, support, and connections to implement strategies at their organizations and in their region.
- **Time Commitment:** Working groups will operate between April to December 2024, with 60-minute monthly meetings as the baseline. We will all convene after the working groups wrap up in early 2025 to evaluate efforts and consider next steps.
- **Working Group Selection:** Let us know if you are interested in joining a working group, or if you know of other potential members we should contact! We will be working to determine membership to ensure that all necessary stakeholders are represented.

# Alignment of Principles

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- We will work to build inclusiveness and intersectionality into our partnerships so that we can expand our collective skillsets and worldviews.
- We will affirm the value in diversity and the rejection of any form of racism, discrimination and oppression.
- We will work together in solidarity and mutuality.
- All participants will work to cooperate with harmony, respect, and trust for genuine and sustained relationship building.
- We will align on, and work towards the common tenets of energy justice.
  - According to the Initiative for Energy Justice, energy justice “refers to the goal of achieving equity in both the social and economic participation in the energy system, while also remediating social, economic, and health burdens on those historically harmed by the energy system (‘frontline communities’). Energy justice explicitly centers the concerns of marginalized communities and aims to make energy more accessible, affordable, clean, and democratically managed for all communities.”

# Next Steps & Q&A

Energy Insecurity Working Group  
Interest Form





# Thank You

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