



Housing Policy Priority Brief

Energy Efficiency

What is Energy Efficiency?

Energy efficiency refers to the use of technologies, practices, and materials that reduce the amount of energy required to power homes, thus minimizing waste and lowering costs for households. In the context of housing, [energy efficiency includes](#) improvements such as enhanced insulation, energy-efficient appliances, the use of renewable energy sources like solar panels, and updated HVAC systems. These measures not only lower utility bills but also reduce a home's environmental impact by decreasing greenhouse gas emissions and dependence on non-renewable energy. Energy efficiency in housing is especially critical for [low- to moderate-income families](#), as it can significantly alleviate the burden of high energy costs, which disproportionately affect those with limited financial resources.

Energy Efficiency in the South

The South has made strides in promoting energy efficiency, particularly in new housing developments and through retrofitting existing housing stock. However, [progress varies significantly across states](#), with some Southern states adopting more aggressive policies and others lagging behind due to political and economic barriers.

Several Southern states have implemented energy efficiency programs aimed at reducing costs for low- and moderate-income households. These programs often offer incentives for upgrading to energy-efficient appliances, improving insulation, and installing energy-saving features like smart thermostats. Additionally, some states have launched public-private partnerships or leveraged federal funds, such as those from the [Weatherization Assistance Program \(WAP\)](#), to enhance energy efficiency in affordable housing units. Despite these efforts, many older homes still lack basic energy-efficient features, leading to high utility costs that [disproportionately impact low-income families](#).

How Energy Efficiency Can Advance Equity in the South

Ensuring energy efficiency in housing is essential for advancing racial and class equity by addressing economic and environmental disparities. Low-income communities, particularly communities of color, often face higher energy costs due to outdated, inefficient housing. These

higher utility bills strain household finances and limit investment in healthcare, education, and savings. Energy-efficient housing reduces these costs, improves residents' quality of life, and contributes to environmental sustainability by lowering carbon emissions. Promoting energy efficiency in affordable housing ensures marginalized communities are included in the shift toward sustainable living. By prioritizing energy updates and offering incentives, Southern states can reduce the energy burden and promote both economic and racial equity.

Legislative Efforts Related to Energy Efficiency

1. **Georgia:** [House Bill 1196](#) (failed): This bill sought to create a fund, established with a portion of revenue from public utility and public transportation companies, to be used to assist low and fixed income customers with utility costs.
2. **Virginia:** [Senate Bill 409](#) (failed): This bill sought to allow localities to adopt and require compliance with more stringent energy efficiency and climate requirements for the construction or rehabilitation of buildings.
3. **West Virginia:** [House Bill 4291](#) (failed): This bill sought to authorize local units of government to adopt local energy efficiency partnership programs and create districts to promote the use of energy efficiency improvements.