

TESTIMONY OF LETICIA COLON DE MEJIAS  
CEO OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY SOLUTIONS AND POLICY CO-CHAIR OF THE HOME  
PERFORMANCE COALITION  
BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ENERGY SUBCOMMITTEE,  
IN SUPPORT OF THE BLUE COLLAR TO GREEN COLLAR JOBS DEVELOPMENT  
ACT OF 2019 – FEBRUARY 27, 2019

Chairman Rush, Ranking Member Upton, and members of the Subcommittee, I am Leticia Colon de Mejias, CEO of Energy Efficiency Solutions, and Policy Co-Chair of the Home Performance Coalition. I founded Energy Efficiency Solutions in Windsor, CT in 2010. My company, together with Best Insulation of Connecticut, which I also co-founded, has completed weatherization and comprehensive energy efficiency upgrades in over 12,000 Connecticut homes and 10 million square feet of multifamily properties. As Policy Co-Chair of the Home Performance Coalition, I help to identify policies and other opportunities to advance the home performance industry, which creates local and well-paying jobs across every state in the nation while simultaneously making our country's residential building stock more efficient, safe, comfortable and affordable by reducing energy bills for millions of Americans.

In addition to my work in the home performance sector, I have also worked as a workforce consultant for twenty two years. I have been the recipient of several national workforce awards and National the Department of Energy awards for my work with the Department of Energy and for engaging urban and minority populations in STEM education as it relates to the energy literacy, civic engagement, and fiscal responsibility. I am honored to be here to testify in support of the Blue Collar to Green Collar Jobs Development Act of 2019.

As a female minority contractor and small business owner I am here to tell you that we in the efficiency industry do not have a jobs problem— we have a labor problem. Jobs in the energy efficiency and clean energy industries exist, and we need qualified workers to fill them. We also need resources to help train our existing employees, keeping them up to date on certifications and trained in the latest technologies and health and safety practices. What we need is a comprehensive, nationwide program to improve education and training for these workers in the efficiency and clean energy industries, including manufacturing, engineering, construction, and building retrofitting jobs. This is exactly what the Blue Collar to Green Collar Jobs Act of 2019 would create.

The energy efficiency and renewable energy industries represent a growing workforce. According to the 2018 Energy Efficiency Jobs in America report issued by E4TheFuture, over 2.25 million Americans work in the energy efficiency industry alone. Energy efficiency is the

fastest growing jobs sector in energy, adding more new jobs in 2017 than the renewables and fossil industries.<sup>1</sup> Efficiency workers now outnumber elementary and middle school teachers and are nearly double those in U.S. law enforcement. Importantly, these jobs are local - 99.7% of U.S. counties have energy efficiency jobs. We have a real need to ramp up implementation of workforce programs that prepare career changers, women, veterans, and other job seekers for the roles which need to be filled if we are to meet our nation's demand for reliable and resilient energy production.

I currently serve as the Policy Chair for the Connecticut Energy Workforce Consortium. In this role I have heard countless energy business owners explain the difficulties they have in hiring staff that have the proper credentials and training required to work in the energy industry. Many of these businesses are small. In fact, a large majority of energy efficiency businesses across the country have fewer than 20 employees. These small businesses are the backbone of our country, but they are also the ones that are in need of assistance when it comes to making new hires and investing in the education and training of their existing employees.

One of the main pillars of the Blue Collar to Green Collar Jobs Act of 2019 is an energy workforce grant program, which would provide just such assistance to businesses that are seeking to educate and train new hires and existing employees in the energy efficiency and renewable energy industries. By covering the wages for these workers during the time they are receiving training, this grant program would significantly help small and medium sized businesses invest in their employees, allowing workers to expand their skill set, do better work, and earn higher wages in the long run.

Of particular importance, which I am pleased to see represented in the legislation, is to give priority to businesses that recruit employees from local communities, minorities, women, and veterans. These are often the hardest working people in our society, who already have a vested interest in bettering their communities. With the proper training, they can excel at positions in the clean energy economy, improving not just their own community, but the nation more broadly.

In addition to helping businesses invest in their employees, we also should be taking steps to engage and educate our young people, as today's youth are tomorrow's workforce. As a contractor and workforce consultant I have spent the last twenty years encouraging underrepresented groups, including ethnic minorities and women, to enter into the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Through Green Eco Warriors, of which I serve as the President and co-founder, I have helped educate over 10,000 children in

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<sup>1</sup> E4TheFuture. "Energy Efficiency Jobs in America 2018." September 2018. <https://e4thefuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/EE-Jobs-in-America-2018.pdf>

over 100 schools, and I continue to work hard to encourage our country's education system to better equip students with the skills, mentorships, training, and technical expertise needed to fill jobs in our emerging clean energy economy.;

What I have learned is that we must work together nationally on these goals. I fully support the objectives embodied in the Blue Collar to Green Collar Jobs Act, and strongly agree that:

**We should** strengthen and more fully engage the Department of Energy programs and national labs in carrying out the Department's Minorities in Energy Initiative.

**We should** implement direct assistance (including financial assistance awards, technical expertise, and internships) to educational institutions, local workforce development boards, State workforce development boards, nonprofit organizations, labor organizations, and apprenticeship programs.

**We should** establish a clearinghouse to maintain and update information and resources on training and workforce development programs for energy-related jobs; Develop a comprehensive understanding of the workforce needs of energy-related industries and job opportunities by State and by region and publish an annual report on job creation in the energy-related industries.

**We should** solicit input from the Secretaries of Education, Commerce, Labor, the National Science Foundation, and energy-related industries to develop best practices and grade-specific guidelines for teaching energy efficiency and conservation initiatives to educate students and families.

**We should** take special care to engage underserved populations and give special consideration to increasing outreach to minority-serving institutions and training providers and make resources available with the objective of increasing the number of skilled minorities and women trained for jobs in energy-related industries; Encourage additional opportunities for MSI students to participate in industry internships and cooperative work-study programs; Partner with the national laboratories to increase underrepresented groups' participation in internships, fellowships, traineeships, and employment opportunities.

**We should** give special consideration to increasing outreach to employers and job trainers preparing displaced and unemployed energy workers for emerging energy-related jobs; make resources available to institutions serving displaced and unemployed energy workers with the objective of increasing the number of individuals trained for jobs in energy-related industries.

**The goals and programs included in the Blue Collar to Green Collar Jobs Act of 2019 would support economic growth and energy security in our nation. When we enhance the ability of our businesses to invest in employees, and when we as a nation invest in our youth in a way that prepares them to meaningfully contribute to the energy economy of the future, we all win.**

**Thank you for your service to the people of United States of America. I look forward to your questions.**

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