



## **When the Bills Are Too High: Energy Poverty and How State AGs Can Help**

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Have you noticed your electricity bill creeping up lately, maybe even faster than other costs? You're not alone. Recently, electricity prices have surged, sometimes outpacing overall inflation. For many families with tight budgets, affording essential heating in the winter and cooling in the summer is becoming a serious struggle. This challenge has a name: "energy poverty." As our demand for electricity grows – fueled by everything from new technologies to hotter summers – ensuring a reliable and affordable energy supply is crucial. Part of the challenge might lie in the complex processes for approving new energy projects, and that's where consumer protectors like State Attorneys General (AGs) can play an important role.

### **Feeling the Pinch: Rising Energy Costs and "Energy Poverty"**

"Energy poverty" simply means not being able to afford the energy needed to adequately heat or cool your home. When electricity costs rise sharply, more people face difficult choices between paying the energy bill and affording other necessities like food or medicine. This isn't just an inconvenience; it can have serious health and safety consequences, especially during extreme weather.

Why are costs rising? Demand for electricity is steadily increasing. We use more electronic devices, and technologies like AI data centers and cryptocurrency mining consume vast amounts of power. At the same time, building enough new power generation – whether traditional plants or renewable sources like wind and solar farms – to meet this demand affordably is a major challenge.

### **Building Our Energy Future: The Permitting Puzzle**

Getting new energy projects built isn't simple. Developers need approvals from various state and local government bodies. These "permitting" or "zoning" processes are necessary to ensure projects meet environmental standards, safety regulations, and community requirements.

However, these approval processes can sometimes become bottlenecks. They can be complex, lengthy, and occasionally subject to delays or challenges that may hinder the development of needed energy infrastructure. When necessary projects get significantly delayed or canceled due to "extraordinary permitting challenges," it can limit the energy supply, potentially leading to higher prices for everyone.

## Why This Matters to You

The connection is straightforward: If we can't build enough power generation capacity in a timely manner to meet growing demand, the basic economic principles of supply and demand suggest prices are likely to rise. Delays in building necessary infrastructure, whether due to legitimate review or unnecessary red tape, can contribute to higher energy bills and potentially impact the reliability of our power supply down the road.

## How State Attorneys General Can Help Keep the Lights On (Affordably)

State Attorneys General (AGs) are the chief legal officers and consumer advocates for their states. While they don't typically set energy policy directly, they have tools and responsibilities that can help address energy affordability and ensure fair processes:

- Ensuring Fair Enforcement of Laws: Just as some AGs monitor local governments to ensure housing laws are followed to encourage needed construction, they can also oversee the enforcement of state laws related to energy project permitting. This means ensuring the existing rules are applied fairly and not misused to create undue barriers to projects that meet legal standards.
- Investigating Unreasonable Delays: AGs can investigate whether specific energy projects are facing "extraordinary" or potentially unlawful hurdles in the permitting process.
- Reviewing State Energy Laws: Many energy laws are decades old. AGs' offices can review these laws and how they're being interpreted to see if they are still effective or if they inadvertently hinder necessary development.
- Promoting Transparency: AGs can push for greater transparency from utility companies regarding how they spend money, especially on large projects, to ensure accountability. They might use existing state laws to require more disclosure.
- Collaborating with Lawmakers: AGs can work with state legislators and committee staff, who often have deep knowledge of the energy sector, to identify specific chokepoints in approval processes and support legislative reforms where needed. They can also ensure new laws aimed at streamlining processes are properly implemented and enforced.

## Navigating the Path to Affordable Energy

Meeting our growing energy needs affordably requires balancing environmental protection, community input, and the timely development of new energy resources. It's a complex task involving many players. State AGs, with their focus on consumer protection and legal oversight, can play a crucial role in ensuring the processes for building our energy future are fair, transparent, and ultimately serve the public interest by helping to keep energy reliable and affordable.

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