

## Utility Bills Place Added Burden on Hartford's Upper Albany Neighborhood

*In the fall of 2021, students at the Trinity College Action Lab studied energy burden in Upper Albany. Here's what they found:*

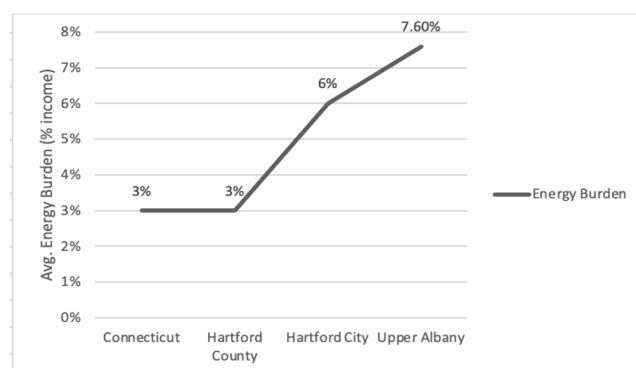
**What is energy burden?** Energy burden refers to the percentage of household income spent on energy costs. It is considered high when energy costs take up 6% of household income.

**What causes it?** Old housing with outdated heating and cooling systems or poor insulation require more energy to heat, cool, and power. Those who suffer most from energy burden are not using energy at a higher rate than others - their homes are simply wasting more.

**Who does energy burden affect?** Energy burden disproportionately affects low-income households. Energy burden is more than 40% higher for African Americans and 20% higher for Hispanics than whites. Renters also face a greater energy burden than homeowners. On average, people in **Upper Albany spend 7.6% of their income on home energy costs - higher than the city of Hartford, and more than double the rest of the state.**



	Connecticut	Hartford County	Hartford City	Upper Albany
Average Energy Burden	3%	3%	6%	7.60%



### What are the impacts of energy burden?

- **Negative health impacts:** These include an increased risk of carbon monoxide poisoning, lead exposure, respiratory illness, asthma, and emotional distress.
- **Sacrifices:** Energy-burdened households-- often older homes, apartments, and in Black and Latinx communities-- have to forgo basic needs as a means to survive. To manage, residents have to put plastic bags over their windows to keep out the cold air, bundle up to stay warm inside, and limit activities based on the temperature outside. Then, it still might not be enough.
- **Shutoffs and reconnection fees:** Those suffering from high energy burden due to where they live or who they are also have added expenses. Multi-billion dollar utility companies, such as Eversource,

shut off the power and then charge fees as high as \$400 to reconnect the power, setting off a vicious cycle of energy instability.

- **Immobility & Gentrification:** Since energy burden exacerbates financial instability, “a lot of people in Hartford....can’t afford to go anywhere,” says Hartford resident Terry. Despite this inability to leave the neighborhood, many residents are being forced out, as another resident noted in the report. In Upper Albany, where most homes are renter-occupied, NYC-based companies are coming in and buying old or abandoned properties (like the one above) to revamp for the affluent - displacing current tenants in the process.

### ***The Solutions for the City, State, and Utilities***

Energy burdened residents are *already* doing what they can to reduce their energy bills. Solutions must address the larger, systemic problem of energy burden and not just focus on individualized, energy-saving techniques.

**Make current energy assistance programs more accessible.** Less than 20% of eligible households in CT obtain energy assistance. To enhance the energy assistance process:

- Provide residents with resources to complete applications.
- Help residents check their eligibility.
- Reduce the number of required documents to shorten the registration process.
- Further quantify the problem of energy burden and create a more accurate assessment of the number of people impacted.

**Increase energy efficiency retrofits in energy burdened neighborhoods.** Retrofits include sealing windows, improving insulation, replacing light bulbs, and other weatherization measures; replacing old appliances with new, fossil fuel-free appliances; switching out old boilers and furnaces and hot water heating systems with new electric, fossil fuel-free heat pumps; and more.

**Deploy rooftop and community solar power.** Investing in solar power for energy burdened communities will further reduce electricity costs. For buildings that cannot accommodate solar panels, the various commercial buildings in Hartford can host solar panels and the power they generate can be used by the surrounding neighborhoods.

**Develop local economies and energy efficiency workforce:** The system needs to be “proactive instead of reactive,” according to residents. Since community members understand their needs better than anyone else, the community should drive the solutions. Job training and business incubation in energy burdened communities can prepare community members to work for, and eventually own, clean energy enterprises.

Information, quotes, and photos from the Trinity College Action Lab’s report, “Energy Burden in Hartford, CT.”

<https://action-lab.org/energyburdenhtfd/>

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