

Polling Memo

TO: Evergreen Action, Power Play New Jersey, Interested Parties
FROM: Matt Krayton & Molly Magarik, North Node Group
DATE: October 6, 2026
RE: New Jersey statewide survey on electric bills and utility business model reform

New Jersey voters say their electric bills are unaffordable, say they get poor value for what they pay, and support lowering the guaranteed profit the state allows utilities to earn. A statewide survey of registered voters conducted September 22 to 26, 2026 for Evergreen Action and Power Play New Jersey finds the strain is felt across party lines, and so is the support for reform.

KEY FINDINGS

- Two in three voters (66%) rate their electric bill a 7 or higher on a 10-point scale where 10 is least affordable. More than a third (36%) give it a 10.
- Seven in ten (70%) say what they pay for electricity is unreasonable for what they get, including 44% who say very unreasonable.
- One in seven voters (15%) has used a buy now, pay later service such as Klarna or Afterpay to pay an energy bill at least once; 5% do so monthly. This equates to roughly a half a million New Jersey ratepayers.
- Asked in their own words how bills have affected their lives, voters describe cutting back on food and extras, falling behind, and choosing between the electric bill and rent, a mortgage or groceries.
- Voters hold the utilities responsible first. Asked who or what is most responsible for their bill, 32% name the utility companies, their profits or their fees, ahead of government in general (20%) and far ahead of any politician or party.
- After hearing arguments on both sides, half of voters (50%) support lowering that rate and 8% oppose it. Support is the same among Democrats (51%), unaffiliated voters (47%) and Republicans (51%).
- Governor Sherrill retains a net-positive approval rating, with 47% approving, 36% disapproving and 17% not knowing enough to say.

Bills are unaffordable, and the pain is intense

Voters were asked to rate their electric bill on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is very affordable and 10 is least affordable. The answers cluster at the top of the scale.

Rating	All voters	Democrats	Unaffiliated	Republicans
10 (least affordable)	36%	31%	41%	39%
7 to 10	66%	63%	67%	69%
1 to 4 (affordable)	13%	13%	17%	9%

The intensity is notable.. More than a third of voters choose the most extreme answer available, and the share is highest among unaffiliated voters and Republicans. The mean rating is 7.4.

How voters are coping

One in seven voters (15%) has used a buy now, pay later service such as Afterpay or Klarna to pay an energy bill. Five percent do so once a month, 8% once every few months and 1% about once a year. These are credit products that neither the utilities nor regulators can see, so the arrears they cover do not show up in shutoff or late-payment statistics.

Text respondents were also asked, in their own words, how their electric bill has affected their lives. Of the 274 who answered, 18% said the bill has little or no effect on them. Nearly half (45%) described general strain without naming a specific change, and about a third named at least one concrete thing they have done:

What voters describe	Share of answers
Cut discretionary spending (eating out, travel, extras)	9%
Emotional toll: stress, anxiety, anger	9%
Payment trouble: behind, payment arrangements, shutoff, bill versus rent or groceries	6%
Cut food or groceries	6%
Use less energy, live less comfortably	6%
Moving or considering leaving New Jersey	4%
Invested in solar, a generator or efficient equipment	3%
Debt, credit cards, borrowing or drawing down savings	2%
Deferred health, family or life plans	2%

Poor value, and responsibility

Seven in ten voters (70%) say what they pay for electricity is unreasonable for what they get, regardless of whether they can afford it. That includes 44% who say very unreasonable. The view is shared across parties: 66% of Democrats, 73% of unaffiliated voters and 74% of Republicans say the amount is unreasonable.

Asked in their own words why their bill is what it is and who or what is most responsible, voters name the utility companies first.

Who or what voters hold most responsible	All voters
Utility companies, their profits or their fees	32%
Government or politicians in general	20%
Their own usage or home	13%
Democrats, Governor Murphy or Governor Sherrill	8%
Supply and demand, fuel costs, inflation	8%
President Trump, federal policy, tariffs or war	7%
Data centers and AI	7%
Plant closures or the push for wind and solar	6%
The Board of Public Utilities or regulators	4%
Aging grid or infrastructure	4%
Don't know	12%

Answers could name more than one cause, so the column does not sum to 100. Utilities lead among Democrats (39%), unaffiliated voters (29%) and Republicans (23%); Republicans are more likely than others to name plant closures (15%) and Democratic officials (17%).

The utility business model: strong support for lowering the guaranteed profit

New Jersey's electric utilities earn a guaranteed return on the money they invest in poles, wires and equipment. The Board of Public Utilities sets that return; it is currently about 9.6%. The poll tested support for changing it.

Half support lowering the rate; fewer than one in ten oppose it. Voters were told that when a utility asks to raise rates, the Board of Public Utilities decides how much profit it can earn on its grid investments, and heard both sides of the argument: that lowering the rate would mean smaller increases on bills while still allowing necessary upgrades, and on the opposing side that it would make it harder for the company to raise money for grid upgrades and reliability.

Lowering the utilities' guaranteed profit rate	All voters	Democrats	Unaffiliated	Republicans
Support	50%	51%	47%	51%
Strongly support	29%	30%	28%	29%
Oppose	8%	9%	8%	9%
Don't know enough to say	42%	40%	45%	40%

The argument for lowering the rate was tested against a common common utility objection, and it still draws six supporters for every opponent.

Other reforms are popular, but with guardrails. We tested a second reform, tying utility profits to keeping bills affordable, keeping the lights on and meeting clean energy goals, was tested against the objection that incentives without guardrails could pay utilities more for things they should do anyway. It draws 38% support and 16% opposition, with 46% saying they do not know enough. In our July polling, we found 70% supported performance based incentives tested without messaging around the potential drawbacks if not well-implemented.

Methodology

North Node Group surveyed 724 registered New Jersey voters from September 22 to 26, 2026, on behalf of Evergreen Action and Power Play New Jersey. Interviews were conducted by text message (524 respondents) and by live telephone (200 respondents). The phone survey asked the core questions on affordability, value, buy now, pay later use, responsibility and utility profits; the open-ended questions on personal impact, needed relief and messages to elected officials were asked of text respondents only.

Results are weighted by gender, age, race, party registration, population density, and region to match the New Jersey registered voter population. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is +/- 4.4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, after accounting for the design effect of weighting; it is larger for subgroups and for questions asked of fewer respondents. Open-ended answers were coded by hand. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding, and questions that allowed more than one answer sum to more than 100.