



To: Members of the Pennsylvania House Consumer Protection, Technology & Utilities Committee

Re: Pennsylvania House Bill 1842, Community Solar Legislation

Dear Members of the Pennsylvania House Consumer Protection, Technology & Utilities Committee,

Solar United Neighbors (SUN) is writing in support of House Bill 1842, which would enable and establish Community Solar programs in Pennsylvania. We thank the Committee for their leadership in holding a hearing to debate this bill. Now is a time when we must be forward-thinking in finding energy solutions for all Pennsylvanians.

SUN is a national nonprofit organization representing tens of thousands of solar owners and supporters across Pennsylvania. The deployment of rooftop solar is the cornerstone of our mission. Unfortunately, rooftop solar is not accessible to everyone. Some homeowners may have trees shading their roofs, whereas others need to replace their roof before installing solar. For others, the upfront cost of solar is too high to be able to afford. While many more are simply unable to install solar because they are renters. These barriers are only a few of the many obstacles that restrict the benefits of solar to being accessible to only a subset of the population.

Community Solar levels the playing field and allows everyone with an electric bill to access the benefits of solar energy. As of February 8, 2024, the U.S. Department of Energy names solar as the most affordable form of energy, meaning the addition of solar to the energy mix reduces costs for all ratepayers. It is clean energy, not prone to polluting the air or water sources, unlike other forms of energy. And the quickly growing market for solar is creating good, family-sustaining jobs all across Pennsylvania. For farmers who host a Community Solar project, leasing their land is a valuable new source of income that allows them to retain the rights of ownership for their land for decades to come.

Enabling Community Solar will allow Pennsylvania to offer a means of savings to its residents that is already offered in 22 other states and the District of Columbia, as well as by many rural electric cooperatives and utilities who have voluntarily instituted community solar programs. These states range the full political spectrum, led by both Republican and Democrat governors and legislatures. This is in direct parallel to the bipartisan support for HB 1842. Indeed, Community Solar bills in Pennsylvania have a history of receiving robust bipartisan support.



Legislators and their constituents understand the popularity of a bill enabling savings on electric rates by way of clean energy production.

HB 1842 has a number of positive policies worth enumerating and commending Representative Schweyer on. Primarily, HB 1842 has excellent consumer protections which SUN, as a consumer advocacy organization, celebrates. Having no requirement for upfront sign-on fees or credit checks reduces the barriers to lower cost energy, especially to lower income residents who would be especially impacted by these requirements. In the spirit of these consumer protections, we recommend that the Committee consider amending HB 1842 to ensure that no additional fees be applied to Community Solar subscribers that are not applied to customers of traditional Electric Distribution Companies.

Labor protections are a strength of HB 1842. The Prevailing Wage and workforce development requirements ensure that Pennsylvanians working on clean energy projects like Community Solar will have well-paid, family-sustaining jobs.

Community Solar projects in Pennsylvania will be paid for with State and Federal funding sources, according to HB 1842. This a very forward-thinking approach that recognizes the unique investment in clean energy on the statewide level that the U.S. Congress made in 2022 with the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act.

The benefits of Community Solar targeting lower income households is inspiring to see. This bill does not define "low income," and we recommend the Committee legislate that definition so that it is not interpreted in a very narrow sense at a later date. SUN recommends that the equitable definition of "low income" include households at 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, which is in keeping with good environmental justice principles.

We were encouraged to see that HB 1842 included language to ensure that the cost for a Community Solar subscription may not exceed the bill credit. We urge the Committee to consider defining "guaranteed savings" so as to ensure that customers save when they subscribe to a Community Solar program. This model is included in approximately half of the 22 existing state programs. In those programs, customers are guaranteed to save anywhere from 5 to 20%, with most states ensuring 10% savings to all subscribers. Not only is saving money extremely popular with constituents, but it also guarantees success for Community Solar projects, leading to more projects, and thus more economic benefits to Pennsylvania and its workers.

This bill includes requirements for the decommissioning and recycling of materials from Community Solar projects, which we understand is included to protect the property of the landowners who host these solar installations. These requirements are sensible, particularly for projects covering many acres of land. However, we are concerned that these requirements



may be onerous to smaller, more creative projects, and may therefore suppress this sector of the market. We would recommend that the Committee consider imposing a size minimum for the decommissioning and recycling requirements, for example 1 (one) MW AC. Local businesses trying to play a new role in their communities by hosting Community Solar programs are much more likely to be on the smaller scale (i.e., smaller than 1 MW AC). These types of small projects are opportunities for small businesses, churches, schools, and other community organizations to reduce their own bills while also benefiting members of the community. Furthermore, these smaller projects are ways in which small, local solar installers may meaningfully participate in Community Solar. Larger projects will more likely be owned by large, regional developers. The local, Pennsylvania economy will disproportionately benefit from a preponderance of smaller, creative Community Solar installations.

In conclusion, SUN supports the passage of House Bill 1842 to enable Community Solar in Pennsylvania. Community Solar will benefit Pennsylvania economically and environmentally by giving residents the choice of saving money while supporting local, clean energy generation. Pennsylvania's status as a leading energy producing and exporting state will be in danger in the near future unless we embrace innovative policies such as Community Solar. We, as well as our supporters, are enthusiastic about the prospect of Community Solar in Pennsylvania.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important subject. Please do not hesitate to consider SUN a resource, and reach out to me with any questions or concerns.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Monica Carey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M" and a large initial "C".

Monica Carey

Pennsylvania Program Director

Solar United Neighbors

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