



**Testimony of Lauren Brunsdale, Associate Developer at Community Energy, Inc.
for the Pennsylvania House Consumer Affairs Committee**

Chairman Roae, and members of the House Consumer Affairs Committee, thank you for allowing Community Energy the opportunity to submit written and oral testimony in favor of HB531. We are a 25 year Pennsylvania-based company, headquartered in Radnor, and we specialize in developing wind and solar, at scale, across the country.

Today Pennsylvanian's are not able to participate in the community solar market without legislative action to open the market and allow access for community solar. HB531 removes the regulatory red tape by enabling Pennsylvanian's to participate in the community solar market through subscriptions to projects built in Pennsylvania. This new market will create the stability the industry needs to make investments in Pennsylvania now – bringing more jobs in every county and greater economic stability to hard working farming communities.

Solar produces more jobs per unit of electricity than any other source of generation—by a wide margin. Solar jobs are good paying jobs including electricians, surveyors, design and civil engineering, real estate, geotechnical, material procurement, distribution, construction, operation and maintenance. Solar works throughout the state from Erie, to Pittsburgh, to Scranton, to Philadelphia – there is immense solar electric generation potential in Pennsylvania with no county left out.

Hundreds of your constituents in farming communities throughout the commonwealth have recognized that solar and farming go hand in hand. During times of economic hardship in our state, a wide array of farmers have decided to lease a small portion of their land to farm the sun in exchange for a steady income with good stewardship of the farmland by the solar projects. Solar is one of the best tools we have for preserving farmland under development pressure. A solar project pays rent at 3 to 5 times the annual income from farming, guaranteed for twenty- five years, and the land stays in the family. We install the posts and racking with minimal grading, without removing topsoil and without concrete foundations. Cover crops like deep-rooted fescue grass or more recently pollinator friendly cover crops improve the organic content and richness of the soil year by year as the farmland lies fallow and the solar panels deliver power to the grid. At the end of the 25-year lease, backed by a decommissioning bond, a farmer can count on removal of the solar equipment, right down to pulling the posts out of the ground, and return of improved farmland to the next generation. That's crucial for farmers, farm families, and all of us who depend on their crops and our energy.

Pennsylvania is behind on solar energy. There are 40 states that have at least one Community Solar Facility online and 20 states (CA, CO, CT, DE, HI, IL, MA, MD, ME, MN, NC, NH, NJ, NY, OR, RI, SC, VA, VT, and WA) and the District of Columbia that have passed legislation to enable community solar programs, creating investment opportunities for their states or district. Community solar projects are larger than typical rooftop set ups, but smaller than utility scale installations. Community solar facilities connect directly into the distribution grid but are still considered behind the meter. As such, the economic drivers and benefits of community solar



projects differ slightly from the other solar market sectors. Community solar is not new, but it is a unique market that Pennsylvania has an opportunity to benefit from.

As an industry we have had many conversations with your committee members about these benefits and have been focused on finding workable solutions that open the market and meet the needs of Pennsylvania. As such, Representative Kaufer has worked tirelessly in the creation of HB531 to find a solution that builds a bridge for immediate investment in the Commonwealth, while also looking to find long-term market solutions.

There are many good examples of effective community solar markets around the country. In 2019, Illinois COMED, a sister company of PECO, developed a smart inverter service payment system that they tout as the most innovative market mechanism for community solar and EDCs. In 2014, Minnesota became the first state to adopt a value of solar policy. Some of the key components are based on avoiding the need to build additional power plant capacity to meet peak energy, reducing wear and tear on the electric grid, including power lines, substations and power plants and purchasing energy from carbon reducing sources.

One of the key values of community solar facilities are the avoided capacity, transmission and distribution investment as a result of adding community solar projects to the grid. When a community solar facility is connected to a distribution grid a developer is required to pay any necessary and reasonable upgrade costs associated with allowing the facility to connect. As community solar facilities come online they reduce the local stress on the system by meeting demand closer to the source. Expanding distributed solar electric generation can defer or eliminate the need for new grid capacity investments, particularly to avoid the cost of investing in new power plants, transmission and distribution lines, and other forms of electricity infrastructure. Furthermore, community solar developers will pay for interconnection upgrades and the implementation of the program at the Public Utilities Commission.

An additional key benefit of solar electric generation is that by producing more power during hot sunny days when demand is highest, with no additional fuel or operating cost, solar generation suppresses higher energy prices during times of peak demand, reducing the cost of electricity during those key hours. Sometimes called “peak shaving” or “price suppression,” this is not a new phenomenon and has been seen routinely in markets with higher percentages of renewables. We quantified those savings in an economic dispatch study that confirmed that adding a significant amount of Pennsylvania solar reduces overall wholesale energy costs for PA customers.

HB531 offers Pennsylvania an important opportunity to allow greater access to solar energy while also stimulating local jobs and new investment in the farming communities that are the cornerstone of what makes the Commonwealth great. Thank you for the opportunity to present some of the facts on solar electric generation in Pennsylvania.