



3/13/2020

Re: Consumer Affairs Committee Hearing on House Bills 531 and 1970

Chairman Roae and Members of the Consumer Affairs Committee:

Sierra Club strongly supports and urges you to vote YES on HB 531, which would enable true community solar projects in Pennsylvania. Community solar projects allow individual electric customers to subscribe to the output of a subset of panels on a larger solar array, and to have the value of the electrical output of those panels credited to their electricity bill. Community solar subscribers receive the same financial benefits as a customer with a system installed on their property, but the system can be located offsite. This produces several important benefits, including:

- Renters and people whose property does not have a large sunny surface suitable for a solar array (combined, up to 75% of electric customers) can have access to solar;
- Consolidating many small solar systems into one large system creates economies of scale that lower installation cost of solar and make it affordable to many more utility customers; and
- Hosts of community solar arrays, such as farms, churches, school districts or businesses, can generate revenue by leasing portions of their property for the array.

The process of bill credits described above is known as *virtual net metering*, and it is currently severely restricted by regulation in Pennsylvania. The regulations were designed with large power plants in mind, and did not envision a world in which affordable solar arrays could boost local employment, supplement landowner income, and produce affordable clean energy for all customers. With 89 cosponsors at the time of this writing, HB 531 enjoys broader bipartisan support across a wider geography and ideological spectrum than any energy bill we've advocated for in recent memory. We urge you to reduce this regulatory red tape, as has been done in at least 16 other states so far.

Sierra Club does not take a position on HB 1970. This bill contains some provisions that are similar on the surface to community solar, but differs in several important respects. The biggest difference is that subscribers to "local solar" projects would not receive any credits to the distribution charges on their bill. Customers would therefore be paying a premium to subscribe to solar power, rather than potentially realizing bill savings. Most already have the ability to switch to solar retail providers. The low income residents who currently cannot would be unlikely to switch if it means paying a premium. Therefore, while we do not believe this bill would create

any regulatory obstacles to clean energy deployment, it is unlikely to result in significant new solar development either. Passage of HB 1970 would simply create the illusion that we are taking action to support more solar development.

Thank you for your consideration, and we are happy to discuss any questions you may have about either bill.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T Schuster', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Thomas Schuster
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8/31/2020

Re: Consumer Affairs Committee Hearing on House Bill 531

Chairman Roae and Members of the Consumer Affairs Committee:

Sierra Club strongly supports HB 531, which would enable true community solar projects in Pennsylvania. Community solar projects allow individual electric customers to subscribe to the output of a subset of panels on a larger solar array, and to have the value of the electrical output of those panels credited to their electricity bill. Community solar subscribers receive the same financial benefits as a customer with a system installed on their property, but the system can be located offsite. This produces several important benefits, including:

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We urge you to hold a voting meeting on HB 531 and move this important legislation to the House floor. Thank you for your consideration, and we are happy to discuss any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

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