



Pennsylvania State Building and Construction Trades Council **AFL-CIO**

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Testimony Before the Pennsylvania House Consumer Protection, Technology and Utilities Committee January 16, 2024 Hearing on HB 1842, Community Solar Legislation

**TESTIMONY BY: Robert S. Bair-President
Pennsylvania Building and Construction Trades Council**

Pennsylvania Chairman Matzie, Chairman Marshall and Members of the Committee:

I thank you both for the opportunity and invitation to testify today on what is certainly a tremendous priority for the trades and we're encouraged by the serious attention that the General Assembly is paying to community solar.

As you both know all too well, I have spent my adult life in Pennsylvania as a 36-year member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and in June of 2022 I was fortunate enough to be elected president of the Pennsylvania Building & Construction Trades Council. I know the value of hard work and I fight every day to make sure that our Building Trades members are heard and represented in the halls of government.

I champion our unions, support and foster apprenticeships and encourage young people to get involved in the trades. I do this because I care about Pennsylvania and its workers.

Community solar will help our established workers, but it will also attract new ones. I often work with our existing apprenticeships to search for young people looking to enter a trade and spread the word about the value of these fields. If we pass this legislation and develop these sites, we will be able to give more opportunities to those that are looking to enter trades, want to work with their hands and earn the income that they need as costs of living continue to rise.

Every single person in this room is well aware of the default rate energy spikes that have been seen over the course of the last several years. Your bills have gone up, your constituents' bills have gone up, and our baseload generation has been reduced. Community solar seeks to add to that very baseline generation by providing an option, not a mandate across each utility service territory in the Commonwealth.

Over the past year, The Statewide Building Trades have worked with developers and legislators alike to ensure that prevailing wage is included in this legislation. While I may just be a little bit biased in saying this—it has been proven time and time again that utilizing trade labor at prevailing wage gets projects done quickly, responsibly, and reliably.

We're thrilled at the Administration's efforts to review permitting reform and get bureaucracy out of the way to move projects that deliver for Pennsylvania, as this program clearly will. Finally, we've spent time lobbying down in Washington to advocate for the full and complete funding of Pennsylvania's FOUR HUNDRED MILLION DOLLAR application to build out the initial market for community solar and solar for schools.

The introduction of a measured and concise solar energy plan will not disrupt the existing types of energy in the state and the many jobs they support – it will be additive. The energy we receive from natural gas, nuclear and coal will still be our baseload generation for the immediate future and these jobs will remain. Community solar will add to the diversity of our grid while helping combat greenhouse gas emissions and allowing us to maintain grid reliability as we move forward.

Too often, organized labor and the trades are accused of not supporting "good environmental policies".

1. Of course we support energy diversification that will result in more jobs for our members.
2. Of course we're going to support projects that are done safely and done right the first time.
3. That doesn't mean that we don't support renewables and any effort that will bring more in-state generation.

Community solar is a perfect mix of cost-efficient, proven renewable policy that the trades support and will stand with industry to build a lasting, sustainable market. It works in every market that has a well-crafted program, programs that resemble Representative Schweyer's bill.

Community solar works in Republican states, it works in Democratic states, and it works in purple states. That's why this bill has bipartisan support, and we look forward to a bipartisan vote from this committee.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Bair".

Robert S. Bair
President