



**Prepared Remarks for Pennsylvania Senate Majority Policy Committee
Hearing on Conservative Approaches to Renewable Energy**

9:00am, October 22nd, 2019

Henry McKay, Pennsylvania Program Director, Solar United Neighbors

Chairman Argall, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for convening this important discussion of renewable energy in Pennsylvania. My name is Henry McKay and I am the Pennsylvania Program Director for Solar United Neighbors, a national nonprofit network of people building a cleaner, fairer energy system with rooftop solar as the cornerstone. I am speaking on behalf of more than 7000 solar supporters in Pennsylvania about the critical need to allow community solar in our state by passing Senate Bill 705.

I give public presentations across Western Pennsylvania to assist people to go solar at their home and business. Last week at a meeting in Clarion County, a woman asked me why we can't just build a large solar array somewhere in the area and have everybody share the cheap energy it generates? This is a question that I hear time and again – whether it's a homeowner with a shady roof in Westmoreland County or a farmer with acres of unused land in Indiana County. And each time I must tell them that what they are describing is currently prohibited in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvanians of all stripes – rural or urban, liberal or conservative – want affordable access to solar. For example, just last month we turned out over 200 people in Greene County, some of them already solar homeowners, at the first annual Greene County Solar Festival. They want to control where their electricity comes from and save thousands of dollars while they're at it. They want the freedom to use solar technology to its fullest extent. Already, 22,000 Pennsylvanians have installed solar at their home or business, but many more are unable to because their roof is too shady or in poor condition, because they rent their property, because a homeowners' association is preventing them from doing so, or because the upfront cost of going solar is simply prohibitive. According to a recent study by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), 49 percent of U.S. households and 48 percent of businesses are unable to host a solar photovoltaic (PV) system. For these people, community solar is their only option.

A community solar project is a single large installation, often one or two megawatts, whereas a typical residential rooftop array is measured in kilowatts. Rather than selling its electricity directly to the grid like a merchant power generator, a community solar project is subscribed to by many individual electric customers. This allows them to benefit financially from the cheaper solar energy without having to physically install solar panels on their own property.

Community solar also benefits the landowners hosting the array. In Minnesota, which boasts one of the largest community solar programs, a dairy farm called Eichten's Hidden Acres leases its marginal land to a 5 megawatt community solar array, which brings them over \$800 per acre per year in lease payments on land which would have generated about half as much were it given over to grazing. This revenue stream allows the farm to stay in business and so that it may be passed on to the next generation. Just think what community solar could do for Pennsylvania farmers, especially dairy farmers, who are

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struggling to stay afloat. And of course, more solar installations results in more solar jobs and businesses throughout the state.

Let's be clear: it is not any limitation of solar technology or energy economics that is preventing community solar from taking off in Pennsylvania. A residential or small business rooftop solar installation, with the cost spread out over the 25-30 year lifetime of the system, currently delivers cheaper electricity than we buy from our utilities, and this is even more true for a community-scale installation. What is holding us back is simply regulatory red tape. Pennsylvania's energy regulations require one solar installation to be connected to one and only one customer's electric meter.

I am asking you to cut through this red tape and make our energy system more competitive and more free. Let Pennsylvania homeowners, small businesses, and farmers use solar technology to its fullest extent, giving them, not monopoly utilities, more choice and control over where their energy comes from.

Pennsylvania has always been an energy leader, from the early days of the Industrial Revolution to today. We earned this mantle by being forward looking and eagerly embracing new energy technologies and fuel sources. But the future of energy is with renewable, affordable, fuel-free sources like solar energy. If we fail to take this opportunity to lead, we will miss out on the jobs, on the economic development, on the cheap energy, and on the historic chance to build an energy system that shares its benefits more broadly, and we will be left behind. Thank you.

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