

Written Testimony of Elizabeth Beiter Oldfield Before the Connecticut General Assembly
Energy and Technology Committee - March 10, 2009
Written Testimony in support of HB 6635, An Act Concerning Solar Power

I am submitting this testimony as a private citizen with no ties to the solar energy industry. The reason I am writing is because I believe our society must transition away from our reliance on energy sources that deplete non-renewing fossil fuels and pollute our environment. We must instead make sincere efforts to reduce our energy use and begin to rely on clean, renewable sources such as solar and wind, that do not pollute and deplete the environment and contribute to global environmental damage.

In previous years I have "believed" in solar power in theory because it's part of the package that conscientious, respectable environmentalists propose to bring us into a cleaner, healthier energy future. However, since my child has become very interested in the solar system I have read much more about planets and stars of late than I can every remember doing. A very important star of course is the sun. A super planetarium show I recently saw was "The Little Star that Could" at the Discovery Museum in Bridgeport. As this show very eloquently describes, Earth's unique proximity to the sun is the main reason it can sustain life for us humans.

Learning more details about the sun has led me to consider the prospect of solar energy in the most simple terms. That is, the sun is out there, doing it's thing, having its nuclear reactions and throwing off heat and light, whether we use it or not. If we capture that energy down here on Earth, it has no impact on the sun. We are not depleting it, making it "die" faster or destroying it in any way. In fact, the non-renewable sources (coal, oil, natural gas) we are currently depleting at a faster and faster rate were formed from plants that died millions of years ago and compacted into their current form. Since the sun is necessary for plants to grow, it is at least partly responsible for original formation our current main energy sources. Ironically, we actually use the most fossil fuels during those times when the sun is the hottest and brightest...our warmest summer afternoons.

So the sun is there as are the technologies we need to harness, store and transmit solar energy our homes, schools and offices exists. The obstacle we have now in our society is in moving from the small amount of solar technology use now to really having it expand tremendously. For that to happen, we need a very strong commitment to investing in the expanse of this technology in terms of money and mindset.

The vast majority of homeowners, I believe, like the idea of using solar power but consider it a costly investment. Every program that provides loans or rebates or any incentives provides confidence to those who are seriously considering this investment. However, it's worrying to hear that that the solar rebate program funds are depleted. The hundreds of solar installations that were made possible by the rebate program was a great start but we can't just let it stop there. We have to keep pushing

toward a future where clean, renewable energies create jobs and result in a healthier environment for everyone.

I think the main parts of HB 6635 accommodate hurdles to the expansion of the solar energy industry by creating incentives, a stable funding source for larger projects, and a market place. The creation of jobs to support the installation of solar technology and the people who train them will be very welcome to communities, especially if those employed actually live in the area. This in turn will allow money to return to the community in the form of income and property tax rather than it being depleted with people moving out of state. A commitment such as HB 6635 is especially needed during these hard economic times. Any legislation that invests money in creating jobs in our communities and keeps the tax money coming in to support our municipalities' support structures must have very high priority.

When government and business leaders begin to report savings by coming off the grid of always-increasing electric rates (driven by the cost of fossil fuels) it will encourage the continued expansion of solar technology and inspire confidence in other businesses and communities, as well as more homeowners, to "come on board." I even think that when citizens see underused areas such as brown fields and empty lots used for harnessing solar energy, they will be encouraged by the seemingly simple but sensible idea for community planning. When business and government leaders and individual members of the community see, in a relatively short period of time, a large influx in the installation of solar technology they will begin to consider our reliance on such technology as the norm, not the exception. Then we will be well on our way to transitioning from our current reliance on burning fossil fuels to the clean use of the non-depleting sun.

I believe legislation such as HB 6635 will go a long way to support a robust effort to move us from the fossil-fuel driven society we now live in to a cleaner and more sustainable one in, hopefully, not to long a period of time. In the meantime it will create jobs that can stay in our community.

Thank you for the time you took to read and consider my viewpoint.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Beiter Oldfield

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