

Written Testimony of Rabbi Andrea Cohen-Kiener, director, Interreligious Eco-Justice Network  
Before the CT General Assembly Energy and Technology Committee  
March 10, 2009 - Written testimony in Support of 6635 An Act Concerning Solar Power

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support of this bill. I am the director of the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network. In this capacity, I have helped over 500 congregations throughout the state become more aware of and supportive of opportunities to develop a clean energy economy. We consider our sector, faith communities, to be a leading indicator of social adaptation. Our network represents a wide cross section of demographics. We have been effective in conservation efforts, renewable energy support and other aspects of a green economy.

I would like to speak to three specific points of interest raised in this bill.

- Non-violability of Funds
- Small Pain – Real Gain
- Mechanism for non-profits and other small to medium scale installers

**Non-Violability of funds:**

IREJN has been promoting various efficiency and clean electricity support mechanisms for 12 years. The single most frustrating aspect of this is that we gear up to support a program and by the time we have public support in response to our efforts – the funds are spent. I know personally that solar installers, CFL lighting vendors and efficiency engineers gear up to meet public demand and then fire people when the funds are used up. This problem creates a self-fulfilling prophecy that “alternative” energy is not viable. More than one governor has treated these set-aside funds as a state piggy bank, which is reprehensible. A sustained secure mechanism with a predictable sunset is critical for a real infrastructure shift. This bill provides for that.

**Small Pain – Real Gain**

This bill is funded through a very small surtax to electric utilities. The pain is both minor and shared. Folks who use a lot of electricity will contribute the most. This seems fairly progressive to me. But the benefit in increased jobs - dignified green jobs at that! – and the seeding of a real shift in our solar capacity are real gains which put us in place to control energy costs going forward. It is not a favorable time to increase costs in any sector, I recognize that. At the same time, we want to emerge from the current downturn in better condition. An unsustainable, volatile energy supply is one of the factors that got us into this economic downturn. This crisis is too big to waste. We should NOT wait it out and try to get back to business as usual. We should build responsibly towards a meaningful improvement in the underlying energy economy.

**Mechanism for Small Scale and Non-Profit sectors**

Roofs across the United States are the new Saudi Arabia. Brown fields, churches, schools and home (as well as the more common malls, big box stores) can be converted to productive purposes by a sustained commitment to solar installations. The single most frequent question I am asked in my job is “How can we pay for the good works we wish to support?” I believe that HB 6635 provides an answer to this question.