

Testimony for S.B. 1104

Hello Senator Fonfara, Representative Nardello and members of the Energy and Technology Committee,

My name is Robin Swartout, and I am here to testify on behalf of Bruce Becker, the president of Becker and Becker Associates. Our firm is currently constructing a mixed-use development in downtown New Haven known as 360 State Street. I have worked closely with Mr. Becker on the green building and energy components of this project and hope to be able to answer most of your questions.

I support the concept behind S.B. 1104, however, there are several substantive changes that I recommend: (1) the legislation should include credits earned through all Class I renewable energy sources, including fuel cells; (2) the legislation should close loopholes that have been exploited by the utilities to limit the intent of the original net metering language; and (3) the legislation should expand electric submetering to all residential and mixed-use multifamily buildings with Class I renewable energy sources.

(1)

I strongly recommend that S.B. 1104 include all Class I renewable energy sources, particularly fuel cells. The benefits of fuel cell technology have been well established within this state, and not just because the two leading fuel cell manufacturers in the country provide hundreds of Connecticut jobs. Fuel cells can provide clean, efficient power and generate usable heat.

(2)

S.B. 1104 should clarify that the net metering statute is intended to apply to customers as owners of an entire building, and not be limited to single meters. The statute requires the utility companies to give credit to "customers" for energy generated on-site, however, the utilities only credit a single meter within the building. As a result, even if enough power is created for the total on-site load of a building with multiple meters, the net metering credit would only be applied to a portion of it. This interpretation has created a de facto limit to the size of potential distributed generation sources.

(3)

Beyond modifications to the net metering statute, S.B. 1104 should promote the use of distributed generation by expanding submetering regulations to apply to multifamily residential and mixed-use buildings with Class I renewable energy sources.

This expansion is necessary so that distributed generation can be used to meet a multifamily building's on-site load. Currently, power generated beyond what the single largest customer can consume must be sold to the utility at a generation rate, and would subsequently be sold by the utility to other users in the building at the considerably higher retail rate. If the customers' accounts were aggregated and then submetered, the power would simply go directly to the users, and the full value of the electricity produced would not be artificially diminished.

This is not a new or untested idea. In Connecticut, electric submetering is already allowed in limited situations and water submetering is becoming common in multifamily buildings. It has been used for over a decade in neighboring states like New York, where there are even incentives for large landlords to submeter.

Submetering can help promote conservation by increasing customers' awareness of their electricity use. At a recent federal hearing to discuss the development of a smart grid, Google, Inc. testified that people would conserve 5 to 15 percent more energy when they are able to see how much they use in real time compared to a monthly bill. Submetering would provide this information to customers at a fraction of the cost charged by the utilities.

I support the intent of S.B. 1104 to promote the use of renewable energy in the state. I hope that you will consider making these important changes that will help expand its use in large commercial and multifamily residential buildings.