

Written Testimony of Michael Trahan Executive Director Solar Connecticut, Inc.
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Energy and Technology Committee
March 4, 2010 in support of House Bill 5362,
"AN ACT CONCERNING RENEWABLE ENERGY"

My name is Michael Trahan and I am Executive Director of Solar Connecticut, Inc., a non-profit group supporting solar energy education in Connecticut

Our members are the more the sixty (60) companies involved in the solar industry in Connecticut. They are electrical contractors, plumbing contractors, suppliers, academic institutions and manufacturers. Mostly, they are businesses that sell, design and install solar energy systems on a full-time basis.

These business owners grew businesses here over the past several years. They assumed all the risk in starting a business and have created between 250 – 300 "green jobs."

These installers are a key component to the development of Connecticut's nationally renowned solar industry and are largely responsible for the safe and quality installation of nearly 1,500 residential and commercial solar energy systems in Connecticut.

You're going to hear a number of statements from installation companies and others on why House Bill 5362 makes sense. I won't steal their thunder instead I'll say simply that Solar Connecticut members strongly support this bill.

My comments will focus on the cost of doing nothing. And there is a cost to doing nothing.

Interest from both small businesses in a position to create solar jobs, and demand from consumers in solar power is both at all-time highs.

Unfortunately, the solar industry is losing jobs. The incentive programs developed by the Clean Energy Fund as part of the big-picture, long-term incentive program funded by CL&P and UI ratepayers – not taxpayers – those programs are just about tapped out.

The first to lose their jobs are the people who go out and sell solar systems. If there are no incentives left there is nothing to sell. So they are being let go.

Most solar installers have a backlog of projects that will take them into the summer perhaps through the fall. So installers will be on the job until then. But system designers will off the job before then. As the backlog shortens office staffs will be eliminated.

I can assure you that well before then the state's solar installer companies will make plans to leave the state. Several of the larger companies already have one foot out the door already taking all the institutional and product installation experience with them.

They are opening offices in Massachusetts and New Jersey where legislatures already have already adopted long-term solar strategies that don't rely entirely on ratepayer incentives. Those states are getting an educated, experienced workforce trained in Connecticut using Connecticut electric ratepayers dollars.

Connecticut ratepayer funds helped to create one of America's best solar workforces and if this bill is not passed, those workers will migrate across the border much to the benefit of ratepayers in those states.

One Hartford company that once considered this city for a manufacturing facility now does all its work in New York state because their solar strategy is focused.

And while many installers are making plans to leave the state, the real losers will be electric ratepayers who've kicked well over \$75M in surcharges on their electric bills over the past 4+ years.

They lose because the Clean Energy Fund incentive has worked. The average solar electric system installed today can be completed for nearly 20-percent less than just a few years ago. That cost savings came about because the incentive created demand and demand helped lower costs. The incentive worked. And the savings it created belongs to the ratepayers.

If solar incentives are cut off, if Governor Rell is successful in raiding the Clean Energy Fund, then demand is curtailed. Prices go up and the \$75M+ that ratepayers invested into a program designed to reduce costs and reduce reliance on fossil fuels will have been a waste.

The green job holders in Connecticut urge you to pass 5362 and not export green job workers to border states at the expense of Connecticut ratepayers.