

Testimony in Support of House Bill 5412, An Act Concerning Shared Clean Energy Facilities

It is with great joy that the town of Windham Energy Commission endorses House Bill 5412, An Act Concerning Shared Clean Energy Facilities.

Windham is a leader in bringing opportunities for clean energy to our community. In the past 3 years of outreach, however, far too few homeowners have been able to put solar panels on their roofs. As we door-knocked to promote solar to our neighbors, Energy Commissioners found that solar can't work for most of our neighbors or for ourselves.

Windham is one of the poorest communities in the state, with over 55% of homes being rental properties. For those who do own their homes, there are many reasons that residents cannot install solar, including shade trees, small yards, condominium rules, historic district concerns, and the cost of "add-ons" associated with small roofs or fewer panels.

We've heard with envy about the "Solar Gardens" in Massachusetts, where solar panels are placed on an empty lot, and the power is shared by neighbors. Why can't we have that?

We can. HB 5412 will enable all energy customers to participate in shared clean energy facilities and receive full credit for the solar energy produced right on the monthly electric bill.

While we applaud and participate at every opportunity in the work of the state's clean energy programs, all customers contribute to these programs, and all should benefit from them, even if they don't own property, or a suitable site. HB 5412 will give everyone the opportunity to purchase clean energy, whether their motivation is to save money, or to save the environment.

And we'll take it one step further. When Windham lost power due to the storms, very few homes had generators. Those who did were polluting the neighborhoods with noise and fumes. Generators are not a viable solution to power outages in an urban environment.

Please encourage the investment of CEFIA funds in power storage and safe interconnections. Home-based solar installations can and should work during outages, but most people will need public financing assistance. The shared clean energy facilities proposed in HB 5412 should function as Micro-Grids to provide localized power during emergencies. They will also benefit everyone in the state by reducing the need to run expensive and polluting power plants at peak times when solar works the best.

HB 5412 is the solution to bringing the clean energy opportunity to every person in CT, regardless of income, or property ownership. The Windham Energy Commission wholeheartedly endorses this legislation.

Sincerely,

Jean de Smet, Chair, on behalf of the Windham Energy Commission