

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2015 TESTIMONY FROM SOLARCONNECTICUT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICHAEL TRAHAN IN SUPPORT OF PROPOSED H.B. NO. 6435 AN ACT STREAMLINING THE PERMITTING PROCESS FOR THE INSTALLATION OF SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC SYSTEMS, AND PROPOSED S.B. NO. 730 AN ACT PROHIBITING HOMEOWNER OR CONDOMINIUM ASSOCIATIONS FROM INTERFERING WITH OR PREVENTING INSTALLATION OF SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC SYSTEMS.

SolarConnecticut -- Connecticut's business association working exclusively with solar electric product makers, distributors, and installers -- strongly supports legislation that reduces consumer costs to generate clean electric power and protects consumer rights to install solar systems.

Reducing costs is especially important for the solar electric industry in Connecticut since electric ratepayers here continue to invest in the state's solar industry through a surcharge on electric bills. The more we can lower costs, the less reliant we need to be ratepayer incentives.

These incentives have produced remarkable success in bringing down installed costs. Currently, homeowners in Connecticut are installing solar electric systems 50-percent larger than systems installed three years ago, and pay 25-30 percent less than what homeowners were paying three years ago for those larger systems. 50 percent more clean, renewable, emission-free electric power for 25-30 percent less cost.

Unlike five years ago, the biggest costs associated with installing solar electric systems today is not the cost of solar panels. Panel prices have come down more than 50-percent since 2008. Soft costs like permitting, inspections, connecting to the electric grid and workers compensation insurance costs make up the majority of costs for residential solar.

We no longer need cheaper solar panels to lower the cost of solar. We need to cut costs. Chief among them is the cost installers pass on to consumers to run solar projects through the local permit process.

Permitting and inspection policies vary from municipality to municipality sometimes with redundant and needlessly complex processes. These inconsistencies can result in consumers paying far more than is necessary to install what's become cookie-cutter solar systems.

SolarConnecticut and its members began working with the Connecticut Green Bank (formerly CEFIA) and municipal leaders across Connecticut to come up with a streamlined permit process. The result is the Connecticut Rooftop Solar PV Permitting Guide. HB 6435 is based on recommendations from this guide. HB 6435 also includes best practices included in forward-thinking California and Vermont state laws supported by top municipal elected officials there who see a streamlined residential solar permit process as saving municipalities money. In fact, cities and counties that have streamlined their permitting, report a 50% decrease in the amount of staff time needed to process the permit applications. Those cost savings are passed on to consumers lessening the need for ratepayer support.

A streamlined process is critical to Connecticut. Solar installations doubled the past three years in a row. Governor Malloy is supporting 2015 legislation that would bring on an additional 300MW of residential solar by 2020 meaning another 30,000 homeowners will install solar energy systems in the coming years. We can save those homeowners as much as \$15M or more in permit fees with the passage of HB 6435.

Due to the importance being placed on residential solar, it's fair to say that the implementation of consistent statewide standards to achieve timely and cost-effective installation of solar energy systems is a matter of statewide concern and that obstacles to their use should be minimized.

Local permitting and inspection of small solar systems cannot be avoided, but they can be streamlined. Streamlining small, now common, home solar systems is the purpose of this bill proposal. State lawmakers in California and Vermont have achieved cost savings for consumers in those states with streamlined municipal permit/inspection processes.

It's also worth noting that Connecticut's Acting State Building Official supports a simplified application process for commonly installed residential solar systems.

SolarConnecticut members who install solar in multiple states say they pass on to consumers workers compensation costs that are 30-50 percent or more higher than in other states. We're working with state Insurance officials to address this cost. We've presented a proposal to the electric utility companies to lower the consumers paid to connect their systems to the electric grid. No response yet. The Green Bank has agreed to consider changes in the process installers go through to access the incentive programs. We're working to cut costs.

If it is state policy to encourage the use of solar electric systems -- and it is -- it should also be state policy to reduce installed costs that the state controls.

On **SB 730**, 25 states have laws in place dating back more than 5 years, that protect homeowners' rights to install solar electric power.

Arizona has a law that stipulates that a homeowners association may not prohibit the installation or use of solar-energy devices (panels and associated devices).

Delaware law enacted bans private covenants (i.e., homeowner's association rules) restricting the use of solar energy systems on residential rooftops. The law specifically prohibits any "covenant, restriction, or condition contained in a deed, contract or other legal instrument which affects the transfer, sale or any other interest in real property that prohibits or unreasonably restricts the owner of the property from using a roof mounted system for obtaining solar energy on his or her property.

Massachusetts also prohibits restrictions on solar devices, voiding "any provision in an instrument relative to the ownership or use of real property which purports to forbid or unreasonably restrict the installation or use of a solar energy system ... or the building of structures that facilitate the collection of solar energy."

The issue of interfering with or preventing installation of solar photovoltaic systems in home associations has been discussed and put to rest in American's most active solar states. There has been no lasting negative impact. In this respect, Connecticut stands largely alone.

P.O. Box 515 · Higganum, CT 06441 · www.solarconnecticut.org · 860-345-7449 · mtrahan@solarconnecticut.org