



Testimony of Environment Connecticut State Director Chris Phelps
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Energy & Technology Committee

3/1/2016

Regarding HB 5427, AN ACT CONCERNING THE SHARED CLEAN ENERGY PILOT PROGRAM

Senator Doyle, Representative Reed, and members of the Committee on Energy and Technology, my name is Chris Phelps and I am State Director for Environment Connecticut. I thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments regarding HB 5427.

The impacts of climate change fueled by global warming are accelerating rapidly. 2015 was the hottest year in recorded history¹, breaking the record last set in 2014. January 2016 was the most abnormally warm month ever recorded², beating out December 2015.

The rapid warming we are experiencing is predicted to result in temperature increases of as much as 10° F over the course of decades³. The results of such catastrophic warming would include more severe weather, inundation of low-lying cities, acidified oceans, and widespread economic and public health disruption. In short, the next 20 to 30 years “offer a brief window of opportunity to minimize large-scale and potentially catastrophic climate change that will extend longer than the entire history of human civilization thus far.”⁴

Given the very real and present dangers posed by climate change, it is imperative that we redouble local, regional, and national efforts to quickly cut the pollution fueling global warming.

For more than a decade, Connecticut has been a leader of regional and international efforts to cut global warming pollution. Policies such as the state’s renewable electricity standard, or “RPS,” Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, and the Global Warming Solutions Act’s mandatory limits on greenhouse gas emissions have helped set Connecticut on the path towards cutting pollution. However, continued progress towards achieving the necessary emissions reductions

¹ http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/21/science/earth/2015-hottest-year-global-warming.html?_r=1

² <http://www.climatecentral.org/news/january-global-temperature-record-20035>

³ <http://nca2014.globalchange.gov/highlights/overview/overview>

⁴ <http://www.nature.com/nclimate/journal/vaop/ncurrent/full/nclimate2923.html>

requires further action by policy makers. In particular, Connecticut should make a commitment to steadily, and aggressively shifting its energy generation away from fossil fuels to zero-carbon renewables. Ultimately, reaching 100% zero-carbon renewable generation by no later than mid-century will be required if we are to cut pollution sufficiently to avoid the worst consequences of climate change.

HB 5427:

Aggressive expansion of homegrown renewable energy sources, such as solar power, can be a key near-term policy to set Connecticut on the path towards a 100% renewable energy future. Since 2011, Connecticut has made significant progress expanding solar power. One measure of that success is found simply in the number of jobs in the solar industry in Connecticut. The recently released Solar Jobs Census from the Solar Foundation⁵ documented continued robust growth in jobs in the solar industry in Connecticut, with nearly 2,000 people now employed by solar companies in the state.

In 2015, the legislature continued Connecticut's progress towards growing solar power. Raising the state's residential solar power program to a target of over 40,000 homes powered by solar was a significant step forward. So was passage of legislation requiring the state to establish a "pilot" program to expand access to solar, and other renewable energy sources, to all consumers, including those who are unable to install solar directly on their homes or businesses.

While Environment Connecticut was, and remains, concerned that the very limited scope of the pilot legislation, allowing only a small (6 megawatts) of shared solar projects, unnecessarily place Connecticut behind other states, such as Massachusetts, with full scale shared solar programs, it is our expectation that the pilot would quickly demonstrate the large demand, and opportunity of such a program in this state. Unfortunately, as the committee is aware, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection failed to meet the statutes deadline of January 1, 2016 to issue a request for proposals to implement the pilot. As a result, Connecticut still lags behind its neighbors and has failed to adopt this program that is rapidly expanding solar power, and creating jobs, in Massachusetts and many other states nationwide.

While we appreciate that HB 5427 is intended to kickstart the pilot process, we are concerned about this proposal on two fronts:

First, HB 5427 unnecessarily delays implementation of the pilot program. Many other states, including our neighbors in Massachusetts, have already implemented full-scale shared solar programs that are producing significant gains in solar power and economic growth. Connecticut

⁵ <http://solarstates.org/#state/connecticut/counties/jobs>

should follow suit. If not with a full scale program (which we believe would be the best course of action) then at least with a full pilot program on the timeline originally enacted by the General Assembly in 2015.

Second, subsection (d) of HB 5427 creates a new and significant financial obstacle to development of shared solar projects in Connecticut by restricting shared solar projects to 15 year agreements with the utilities to purchase their power. This could very likely have the effect of artificially increasing the cost to consumers of solar from these projects and make it difficult or impossible to finance shared solar projects in Connecticut. In short, this new provision could serve as a “poison pill” preventing shared solar developers from doing business in Connecticut.

For these reasons, Environment Connecticut opposes HB 5427 in its current form.

We respectfully offer these suggestions to the committee:

1. Eliminate or amend subsection (d) of the bill. A workable alternative might be to require that the EDCs purchase power from shared solar projects for their full viable lifespan. (At least 25 years.)
2. Lift the unnecessarily restrictive 6 megawatt cap on the program. This cap can only serve to restrain the pace of growth in this potentially large market in Connecticut at a time when our state urgently needs to both cut pollution and create new jobs for its residents.
3. Retain the existing timeline for implementation of the program.

Changes such as these would make HB 5427 a strong bill that Environment Connecticut could enthusiastically support.

Sincerely,

Chris Phelps
Environment Connecticut State Director