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Martin Mador, Legislative Chair

Committee on Energy and Technology
March 1, 2016
Testimony in Opposition to HB 5427 An Act Concerning the
Shared Clean Energy Facility Pilot Program

I am Martin Mador. I speak today as the Sierra Club Legislative and Political Chair. I have also been on the Hamden Energy Use and Climate Change Commission for 9 years. I hold a Master's of Environment Management from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

I want to thank you for raising HB 5427. As you will understand in less than 3 minutes, you have created an opportunity and a vehicle to rectify a past mistake and give us the program Connecticut wants and needs.

Last year we passed a shared solar bill (Senate Bill 928, Public Act 15-113) which called for a very small 6MW 2 year pilot program. DEEP has delayed setting this up. PURA eventually declined to get involved, so right now we have nothing but an outline of DEEP intentions through the fall.

But there is no need for such a pilot. We know how to do Shared Solar. Over 10 states now have programs in place. The CT Academy of Science and Engineering (CASE) wrote a spectacular 112 page report for the legislature last year explaining exactly how to do this.

We can approximate the value of the electricity produced by each facility. Apply that value immediately, reserve the right to tweak it over time.

The pilot program is nothing more than a 2 year delay which makes only the electric distribution companies (Eversource and UI) happy.

The 2 bills introduced this year about a Shared Solar program (HB 5427 and SB 334) do not fix the problem, they only tweak the unnecessary pilot, which holds minimal hope for moving us along quickly to the full program we need.

We need vastly more solar electricity generation than we have. We lag way behind other states, like Massachusetts. Any promotion of fossil fuel expansion in the state must be countered by every possible effort to expand renewable energy. A full Shared Solar program is the most effective way to do exactly that.

Solar energy:

- saves the consumer money
- reduces our dependence on fossil fuels imported from other states or countries
- generates no climate disrupting CO2
- helps us keep our climate change goals and promises
- creates Connecticut jobs
- draws financial energy investments to the state
- creates businesses

What are the drawbacks to solar?

- no one is making any profit when the sun shines creating electricity
- the EDCs don't know how to make money from this
- we are not exactly sure precisely how much a solar generation facility should be paid for the electricity they provide to the grid
- we still need to maintain the distribution grid, with a funding mechanism to support it

4 in 5 CT residents cannot have access to solar because the home they own is shaded, because they are renters in apartments, because they live in a condo. Even businesses which rent office space in a building they do not own cannot use solar. But all of them could become subscribers to a shared array. If we let them.

But you know all of this. You heard it all in testimony for SB 928 last year.

So how do we maximize solar energy generation as quickly as possible? By establishing a Shared Solar program. But it cannot happen without legislative authorization. And that's the opportunity HB5427 gives us.

Waiting 2 years or more for a full, robust, useful program just has no justification. None whatsoever. None.

I have briefly reviewed DEEP's Implementation of the Shared Clean Energy Facilities Pilot Program Pursuant to Public Act 15-113 dated March 1, 2016. DEEP now says the Pilot will still not be ready until the fall. The term of a 15 year purchase cap remains. Unquestionably, this delays the program we need, for no public benefit.

So how long a delay until we have a real, useful, helpful, Shared Solar program will we tolerate? The legislature must take responsibility for getting us where we need to be. Now.

So look at HB 5427 as an opportunity. A way to fix last year's mistaken result. Use it to trash can the unnecessary pilot and move immediately to a full scale Shared Solar Program.

Everyone who needs electricity and has to pay for it will be grateful.

People who understand the desperate need to vigorously address the climate crisis will be grateful.

People who want to see us keep our promises to minimize the state's contribution to climate change will be grateful.

Your constituents will be grateful.