



FEBRUARY 21, 2019 COMMENTS TO CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY’S ENERGY & TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE FROM SOLARCONNECTICUT (SOLARCONN) EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MIKE TRAHAN AND SOLARCONN GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN NOEL LAFAYETTE, PRESIDENT SHR ENERGY

OPPOSE - Proposed S.B. No. 220 AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN SOLAR POWER FACILITIES AND NET METERING CREDITS FOR MUNICIPALITIES WHERE SUCH FACILITIES ARE LOCATED.

SUPPORT - Proposed S.B. No. 468 AN ACT CONCERNING THE INSTALLATION OF SOLAR PANELS ON STATE LAND NEAR PUBLIC HIGHWAYS.

SUPPORT - Proposed H.B. No. 5002 AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A GREEN NEW DEAL.

SUPPORT - Proposed H.B. No. 6237 AN ACT REQUIRING A STUDY OF ENERGY STORAGE PROJECTS AND DISTRIBUTED GENERATION IN THE STATE.

Committee Chairs and Ranking Members and Member of the Energy & Technology Committee –

SolarConnecticut, the state’s solar energy business group includes nearly 40 businesses installing and developing commercial and residential solar power systems in Connecticut since 2007. In Connecticut, 2,200 workers are employed by solar businesses. Below are our comments on bills listed above.

Proposed S.B. No. 220 An Act Concerning Certain Solar Power Facilities And Net Metering Credits For Municipalities Where Such Facilities Are Located. Starting in 2014, Class I renewable energy sources -- including solar -- were exempted from property tax payments. Lawmakers rightly determined that business owners deserved the same tax exemption that home solar users were granted years earlier. The idea then, as it is now, is to create circumstances that encourage business owners to pursue clean energy projects that [1] lower the cost of electric power, [2] increase the use of clean, renewable power, [3] create more in-state clean energy sector jobs, [4] generate tax revenue for the state, and [5] ultimately drive down the cost of solar.

Connecticut ratepayers benefit from solar wherever it is properly sited. Unfortunately, not all municipalities have abundant land resources where solar works. And so state law allows municipal electric accounts to be virtually credited from lower cost solar power generated elsewhere in the same utility territory. This is known as “Virtual Net Metering. It’s not a new concept. It allows those unable to access solar power (apartment dwellers, shaded property owners, etc) to invest in clean power. It’s a good thing. While land owners are fully compensated for hosting virtual net metering projects, host municipalities may feel they are not. And while there may be opportunities for a fair resolution, SB 220 is not it. Parceling out net metering credits to multiple audiences, as SB 220 proposes, is a financial and bookkeeping nightmare. That being said, we have reached out to the bill sponsor to discuss this issue and have agreed to work together to produce a fair solution.

Proposed S.B. No. 468 An Act Concerning The Installation Of Solar Panels On State Land Near Public Highways. To reach the state’ clean power goals the state must get more power from clean sources. Too much time and effort has been placed on investing in clean energy projects outside Connecticut. Doing so forfeits all economic development benefits to other states. But meeting the electric load demanded by state facilities using solar would require large areas of land. SB 468 would appear to be an answer given the hundreds and hundreds of acres owned by the state including, but not limited to, land adjacent to interstate highways. It’s possible that state owned lands bordering highways and elsewhere could be leased to developers who would develop solar projects for private commercial or shared/community solar project use too. Installing solar near public highways and other state lands would lower the state electric bill paid by taxpayers. It would help Connecticut meet its clean energy use goals. It would create in-state clean energy jobs and generate substantial tax revenue for the state especially if that work were done by local companies.

Proposed H.B. No. 5002 An Act Concerning The Development Of A Green New Deal. SolarConn supports creating new programs to provide funding for energy efficiency, renewable energy, sustainability and resiliency. In fact, we see this bill as an appropriate vehicle to fund Proposed H.B. No. 6237 An Act Requiring A Study Of Energy Storage Projects And Distributed Generation In The State (see comments below).

But while we share the excitement over the federal and state Green New Deal proposals, we wish to point out that two *Green Old Deals* that created and now sustain 2,200 jobs in Connecticut are about to collapse under the weight of the horribly flawed Sec. 7 within 2018's SB9 passed last year.

Outside of funding a Value of Solar or Value of Distributed Resources study as suggested in HB 6237, and the rightful restoration of ratepayer funds back to the well-run efficiency programs managed by Eversource and United Illuminating, and the solar programs managed by the Connecticut Green Bank, we have no specific asks of HB 5002 at this time.

We do though respectfully ask that before the Committee looks ahead to creating and funding new programs that create future green collar jobs in Connecticut, the Committee first turns its attention to the urgent situation facing dozens of solar business owners and over 2,000 workers currently working in the solar sector who will be out of work if the Committee does not act to correct and improve several aspects of Sec. 7 within last year's SB9. We thank the Committee for hearing bills related to sustaining the current solar workforce in the weeks ahead.

Proposed H.B. No. 6237 An Act Requiring A Study Of Energy Storage Projects And Distributed Generation In The State. A recent study showed that more than one in three solar shoppers are also interested in a home battery to store solar power generated during the day but not used in real time. The price of batteries is dropping at a pace quicker than the decline in solar panel prices. Early adopters in Connecticut are already enjoying the benefit of storing excess solar power in batteries and using their own self-generated power at night instead of using grid power. For solar installers in Connecticut, battery installation is hampered more by product supply than customer demand.

The idea behind HB 6237, as we understand the sponsor's intent, is an idea that's been proposed several times over the past six years in various forms. Its time has come. Importantly, this bill would give energy policy makers a valuable tool they've lacked until now that's necessary to create good renewable energy policy ... real and transparent data on the value of solar. Policy makers at DEEP have largely acted in the dark in their recent solar policy proposals. It made last year's SB9 debate over net metering chaotic for so many months ultimately leading to two major pieces of Sec. 7 remarkably being overturned on a voice vote in the state House late in the session (amendments later withdrawn). It's time that DEEP is required to use real data collected from reliable sources and made available to the general public to make policy decisions that impact the thousands of workers in the solar sector that ratepayers depend on to deliver quality solar installation services.

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