Energy and Technology Committee
JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-468
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING THE INSTALLATION OF CLASS I RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES ON STATE LAND NEAR PUBLIC HIGHWAYS.
Vote Date: 3/14/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable
PH Date: 2/21/2019
File No.: 217

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Energy and Technology Committee
Co-sponsors:
Sen. Norm Needleman, 33rd Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

Sen. Needleman originally offered the proposed bill because he sought to utilize unused state owned land on the sides of highways for solar panel installations. The committee saw the value of this proposal and drafted the bill to request that Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection and the Dept. of Transportation study what unused land could be utilized for the installation of solar panels and other Class I renewable energy sources. The report should contain an inventory of land as well as possible funding sources for setting up the panels.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Katie S. Dykes, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection: Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) testified in support of SB-468. They support the concept of increasing electricity generated through renewable energy sources, and explain how the state agencies already have the authority to implement renewable energy initiatives on state land. DEEP cannot support legislative requirements for other state agencies, particularly the Department of Transportation, in the selection of projects in specific locations. DEEP highlights the necessity of considering various factors in the site selection process, including plans for continuous asset management as well as state roads and buildings. DEEP emphasizes the need for
flexibility in guaranteeing sensible and cost-effective investments in renewable energy initiatives.

**Joseph Giulietti, Commissioner, State of Connecticut Department of Transportation:**
Joseph Giulietti testified on behalf of the Department of Transportation (CTDOT) in support of the benefits of renewable energy generation, however, questions a variety of factors in the implementation, particularly on land on the side of highways. He believes that the most effective approach would be to utilizing existing facilities and commuter parking lots for installing the panels. In CTDOT’s written testimony a list of technical and operational circumstances that they suggest should be followed is offered:

- Solar installations require a long-term commitment (20 – 25 years); and state that the highway right-of-way should be reserved for future projects that attempt to relieve congestion.
- The physical characteristics of a site must adhere to criteria conducive to solar energy generation, for example, environmental conditions.
- There must be safe access for the construction, operations, and maintenance of a solar installation sited along a highway – requires Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approval.
- If a solar plant is mounted on a structure, the structure must be able to support the load.
- A site with a solar installation requires proximity to a point interconnection, transmission lines, and power user.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

Numerous constituents testify in support of SB-468; the central focus of their testimony is in support of promoting clean renewable energy. They state that the proposal makes sense in terms of both the environment and the economy.

- **Eileen Browne**
- **Daniel Knudsen, Member, New Haven Energy Task Force** – Supports the bill but requests that clarification is included on what “state owned land” means.
- **Joseph J. Selvaggio**

**Ann Gadwah, Chapter Chair, Sierra Club:** Sierra Club strongly supports SB-468. The organization believes it would make valuable use of vacant public land, support energy generation, increase revenues to the state, and provide support to the adoption of electric vehicles. As noted by the Federal Highway Administration, Sierra Club’s testimony states a list of benefits for the State which includes:

- Saving money on electricity costs;
- No up-front development costs and funding from alternative sources such as public-private partnerships or third party owners;
- Local green job market growth that enhances the viability of the renewable energy industry;
- Reduced air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions;
- Increased energy security by diversifying energy generation and delivery methods.

“Senate Proposed Bill 468 will provide the framework for Connecticut to maximize the value of an unused State asset cut operating costs, increase revenues, reduce greenhouse gas
emissions, generate renewable energy, add jobs, and support the adoption and use of an electric vehicle.”

Joined by:

Art Helmus, Executive Committee
Martha Klein, Executive Committee

Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association: Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) moderately supports SB-468 of with language clarification on the broad application of the term “state-owned land.” Ideally, the organization would want SB-468 to clarify the language to “owned by the Department of Transportation.” CFPA clarifies there are many acres of state-owned lands held by DEEP that are adjacent to public highways and may not be compatible with the installation of solar panels.

Mike Trahan, Executive Director, Solar Connecticut: Solar Connecticut (SolarConn) testifies in support of SB-468; as the company believes the bill would be fitting for Connecticut given the number of acres owned by the State that could be developed. SolarConn clarifies installing solar panels near public highways would lower the state electric bill, help Connecticut meet its clean energy use goals, create in-state clean energy jobs and generate substantial tax revenue for the state.

Joined by:

Noel Lafayette, President, SHR Energy

Chris Phelps, State Director, Environment Connecticut: Environment Connecticut is an environmental advocacy project that represents 20,000 supporters and activists that strongly supports the bill. Their testimony notes that SB-468 should incorporate provisions to require that any such solar generation sites in an environmentally appropriate manner with regards to such as habitat preservation.

Peter Rothstein, President, Northeast Clean Energy Council: Peter Rothstein testified on behalf of Northeast Clean Energy Council (NECEC) in strong support of SB-468. The organization discusses the success Massachusetts has had with their highway solar panels adjacent to Interstate-90.

Joined by:

Jamie Dickerson, Senior Policy Manager

Tom Swan, Executive Director, Connecticut Citizen Action Group: Connecticut Citizen Action Group (CCAG) strongly supports SB-468. Swan states that “as the bill goes forward it needs a clearer process for implementing this and clarity on the language related to public lands would be helpful.”

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None offered

Reported by: Elizabeth Blackman       Date: 4/1/19