

Comments of the Union of Concerned Scientists in Support of Low-Income and Environmental Justice Solar Legislation, H2843, and H2877, S1931, and S1956

Massachusetts Joint Committee on Telecommunication, Utilities and Energy Hearing, 6/25/2019

Thank you, Chairman Golden, Chairman Barrett, and committee members. My name is Paula García and I am an energy analyst in the Climate and Energy program at the Union of Concerned Scientists, a non-profit that puts rigorous, independent science to work to solve our planet's most pressing problems. Joining with people across the country—including 21 thousand supporters in Massachusetts—we combine technical analysis and effective advocacy to create innovative, practical solutions for a healthy, safe, and sustainable future.

There are a range of important bills under consideration by this committee today, including ones that address low-income and environmental justice solar legislation from a range of angles. I will focus my brief remarks in support of the opportunities presented in H.2843, *An Act removing barriers to solar for low-income communities*; H.2877, *An Act relative to solar power equity in low-income and environmental justice communities*; S.1931, *An Act relative to solar power in environmental justice and urban communities*; and S.1956, *An Act ensuring access to solar energy for all communities*;

As this committee knows well, solar energy in Massachusetts has helped its customers reduce their electricity bills, cleaned the air that we breathe, and generated more than 10,000 jobs in the commonwealth. Those fighting against the climate crisis have also found in solar an important ally.

However, changes to solar legislation in 2016 negatively effected low-income and community shared solar applications. While owners of a roof with solar receive 100% of the retail rate for the excess power that they share with the grid, those that don't own a roof or don't have one appropriate for solar are being compensated now at just 60% of retail rates.

Unfortunately, the reduction in compensation for community solar customers only reinforces inequity trends in solar adoption at national level. Analysis from the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) shows that rooftop solar has been primarily concentrated in higher-income households at national level.¹ The analysis also shows that nearly 60 percent of solar potential for low- and moderate-income buildings exists on renter-occupied and multi-family buildings. Recent research from Tufts University and the

¹ National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL). 2018. Rooftop Solar Technical Potential for Low-to-Moderate Income Households in the United States. Golden, CO. Online at <https://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy18osti/70901.pdf>, accessed June 25, 2019

University of California-Berkeley also shows that black- and Hispanic-majority census tracts have installed 69 and 30% less rooftop PV, respectively.²

In Massachusetts, nearly 40 percent of housing units are renter-occupied.³ This translates into more than 1 million Massachusetts households facing that barrier to installing rooftop solar. This number is even greater if we consider those that live in multi-family buildings, in buildings with a reduced roof area, or with roofs that are not optimal for installing solar panels.

The solar potential in rooftops in low- and moderate-income households is significant. The NREL analysis found that it is more than 40 percent of the total U.S. residential solar potential.

And our existing mechanisms for expanding solar are not sufficient. Although the SMART program tried to put in place incentives to develop low-income solar, just 3 percent of projects selected—193 projects out of 5600—qualified for the low-income adder.

Finding ways to broaden solar's reach is important for the many among us that haven't had access to the technology's direct benefits. It's also important for us as a state, because reaching our climate and energy goals requires us to make sure we're using the full range of resources available to us.

We urge you to take the needed steps to ensure that the benefits of solar, such as reducing the energy burden, increasing resilience, and hedging against rate changes, are available to all ratepayers. That's where H2843, H2877, S1931, and S1956 come into play. Some of their key provisions include:

- Requiring future solar incentive programs to include a carveout for low-income families and renters, which will establish a minimum deployment of solar for these groups
- Restoring the full value of net metering credits for community solar projects serving low-income and EJ communities, which will remove inequities in compensation for the excess power that they share with the grid
- Allowing owners of solar facilities, as Rep. Dykema's bill would, to receive compensation for their energy as a direct payment from the utility, which will facilitate the allocation of net metering credits to low-income households and reduce administrative costs
- Allowing solar projects to share solar bill credits with any utility customer in the Commonwealth—across load zones and utility territories—which will ensure that all households in Massachusetts have the opportunity to directly benefit from solar

² Compared with no majority tracts; white-majority census tracts have installed 21 percent more. Sunter, D., S. Castellanos, and D. Kammen. 2018. Disparities in rooftop photovoltaics deployment in the United States by race and ethnicity. Online at <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41893-018-0204-z.pdf>, accessed June 25, 2019

³ United States Census Bureau. Quick Facts Massachusetts. Online at <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MA/HSG010218>, accessed June 25, 2019

We very much appreciate your attention to H2843, H2877, S1931, and S1956, and to the important issue of making sure that the benefits of solar reach everyone in the Commonwealth. With the clear signals that these bills would help provide, we can continue to turn from the challenge of the climate crisis to the promise of a clean energy economy. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paula' followed by a stylized 'García'.

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