

Community Solar for PA

House Bill 1842

Community solar increases equitable access to clean energy, allowing all Pennsylvanians to benefit from solar power whether they rent, own a home, or have a roof that can support solar panels.

Legislation authorizing community solar is on the move! Here's a breakdown of the bill, and how it lines up with priorities that Pennsylvanians have identified for a people-focused community solar program.

What is there to like?

These aspects of the bill reflect what community advocates asked for during the bill drafting and amendment process.

Maximized Benefits for Low-Wealth Communities

Community Solar allows benefits to be targeted to low-wealth communities, which otherwise lack access to clean energy otherwise. This bill directs federal funds to support low-income participation and benefits, sets a strong definition of low income, and empowers the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) to do more.

No Upfront Costs, Credit Checks, or Termination Fees

Low-wealth communities are less able to pay upfront in order to secure long term cost-savings. Under this bill, subscribing to solar cannot include up-front fees or credit checks for potential subscribers. It also prohibits termination fees, which can damage trust and create the threat of an added expense.

Labor Protections

Clean energy jobs should be well-paid, stable, and accessible to all. The bill requires prevailing wage for all community solar projects and includes penalties for non-compliance.

Strong Consumer Protections

In the past, energy subscribers – especially low-income subscribers – have been harmed by unscrupulous business practices. Community solar must make a clean break with that history. This bill requires community solar organizations to share key information with potential subscribers in English & Spanish, and directs the PUC to implement further consumer protections.

Supplemental to Existing Programs

Community solar should build on rather than compete with funding for existing renewable energy, low-income, and energy efficiency programs. Under this bill, project financing is based on renewable energy credits, federal incentives, and a PUC-determined bill credit, meaning there is no competition for funding with existing programs.

What's missing?

These issues could be addressed through amendments to the bill, other venues (advocating at the Public Utility Commission), or parallel programs.

Guaranteed Savings

Guaranteed minimum savings, either as a percentage or simply as the guarantee that subscribers will save money, will ensure that the program benefits Pennsylvanians and protects consumers.

While this bill requires that community solar not cost participants more than it saves – which is critical – it stops short of requiring guaranteed savings.

Additional Support for Community Ownership

Additional support for community-owned projects is key to long-term wealth-building and energy independence, and should be an available option for those who want it – with special consideration for low-wealth communities. This bill does not provide additional support for community-owned projects, though it also does not prohibit them.

Streamlined Eligibility Verification

Requiring low-income subscribers to provide additional documentation of their income can result in additional barriers to participation as well as concerns around privacy. The bill does not address eligibility verification, though it also does not include any benefits that require proof of eligibility other than through the use of federal funds.

A Clear Source of Long-Term Funding

Since this program is focused on capitalizing on available federal funding, it's unclear how well it can grow or sustain itself once that funding is expended. There should be a clear funding source in place that takes into account the advantages to all Pennsylvanians that come from investing in a clean energy future, while also maximizing benefits and minimizing costs to all rate-payers.

Utility-Consolidated Billing

Requiring community solar subscribers to manage an additional bill for their community solar subscription – even if the bill credit they receive from their electric utility more than makes up for the added cost – is an added hassle, and creates a barrier to participation in the program. A better approach is to have all billing “consolidated” to run through the utility, so that subscribers have no extra bills to pay. Many states require utility-consolidated billing, but this bill currently prohibits it.

So Now What?

It's been years since a PA community solar bill has advanced this far, and our work is only just beginning! Join us in continuing to advocate for a community solar program that puts people first. We'll need all hands on deck to get this issue over the finish line.

To learn more and get involved, contact:

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