



Testimony before the Consumer Affairs Committee of The Pennsylvania House of Representatives

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Pennsylvania Conservative Energy Forum · www.penncef.org

Good Morning Chairman Roae, Chairman Matzie, and members of the House Consumer Affairs Committee. My name is Chad Forcey, and I am the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Conservative Energy Forum.

The Pennsylvania Conservative Energy Forum (PennCEF) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational foundation committed to clean and renewable energy and energy diversity in the Commonwealth. Led by a Board and Leadership Council of prominent Pennsylvania conservative leaders from government, industry and education, PennCEF believes that renewables like solar, wind and biomass should be included in our proud Pennsylvania “all of the above” energy sector. For PennCEF, “all of the above” means that renewables deserve full access to markets, in addition to other significant sources like natural gas, nuclear and coal.

The Commonwealth leads the nation in domestically-produced energy exports. Next-generation solar technologies bring the promise of even greater economic expansion to our strong and diverse energy portfolio. Clean and renewable energy jobs now account for the greatest portion of job growth in this sector, as illustrated by the [2019 E2 Clean Jobs Pennsylvania report](#). The report found that Pennsylvania’s clean energy jobs now stand at more than 90,000 and are growing at an annual rate of 6%—a growth rate five times the overall job growth in Pennsylvania.

As we emerge from the ravages of the pandemic, the need for economic recovery is paramount. In the field of solar, legislation that opens markets to create more jobs and spur new investments represents a real win for Pennsylvania. HB 531 would accomplish these goals, through the creation of a new Community Solar marketplace in the Commonwealth.

HB 531

As conservatives, we believe in open markets, less red tape, and greater economic freedom. [HB 531](#) accomplishes these goals in the spirit of free market capitalism, which we cherish. We thank State Representative Aaron Kaufer (R-Luzerne) and State Representative Donna Bullock (D-Philadelphia), plus the more than 80 additional House members who co-sponsored the legislation, for the introduction of Community Solar Legislation.

HB 531 would allow the installation of solar projects by multiple residents, farmers or business owners on a single property. By extending this right to community solar organizations, HB 531 provides far greater numbers of PA citizens the opportunity to go solar. As PennCEF Leadership Council member, former Reagan Administration Navy Secretary and 9-11 Commission Member Dr. John Lehman recently [wrote](#) in *The Patriot News*:

The advantages of allowing groups of citizens to come together and complete a new solar project are many. It would be much easier to install solar arrays. Currently, the rule in Pennsylvania is “one property, one solar project,” but the cost is often too high for individual farmers or residents to develop a project on their own. Under the legislation, however, individuals could band together to finance each project. So, in the farming context, if one farmer has a ridgeline otherwise unusable for growing crops, he or she could form a community solar organization with a group of neighboring farmers. Collectively, they could get a loan for development ... and invest in their future as farmers.

This example can be applied proportionally in the business and residential property contexts. By increasing access and leverage for development, HB 531 democratizes the ability to “go solar” for all of our Pennsylvania citizens.

This legislation is the necessary next-step in opening new markets for electricity generation in Pennsylvania. If this legislation is not passed in 2020, we will keep the community solar market closed, and homegrown solar generation will remain out of reach for many Pennsylvanians. As 19 other states have found, opening these markets is good for jobs and the economy. So, one way to make solar far more practical is to cut the red tape, and open the door for new investors. We understand that upwards of \$2 billion in new investments await the passage of this bill in 2020.

Our solar industry is an American industry, supplied by American companies, that produce American electricity. At least [25 companies](#) produce solar panels in the United States, and more production is in the works from these and other American entrepreneurs. PennCEF supports American solar manufacturing, installation and expansion. And, it is popular with all voters. Our polling, conducted by respected Republican pollster Glen Bolger, has consistently found that support for solar at the national level is strong across political and demographic groups, from 74-76%. Our recent [Pennsylvania numbers](#) are even stronger, with 81% in favor of community solar, including more than 60% of Republican voters.

I would be remised if I did not mention the crisis in PA agriculture, which was discussed prior to the pandemic, and has only worsened since then. Millions of gallons of milk were dumped, due to the breakdown of supply lines. Dairy farms have born the brunt of this new economic reality, but farms in every major commodity across PA have been eligible for emergency federal assistance, totaling more than \$123 million since February. There is no question that HB 531 would help farmers to diversify their profits and productivity, and take advantage of the unused open space on hillsides, on the roofs of barns, chicken houses and other structures. On the land itself, farmers can take advantage of temporary development enhancements (solar panels are not permanent): soybeans, pollinator-friendly crops and even beehives can flourish underneath solar panels.

The Pennsylvania Farm Bureau has endorsed HB 531. Their 2019 Senate testimony on the subject states:

We can see agriculture playing a key role in the development of community solar projects.... Community solar would allow multiple landowners to pay for, and receive credit from, a group project. We believe that Pennsylvania should open the door for community solar energy generation and give landowners the ability to participate in these projects if they so choose. We are calling on lawmakers to pass either HB 531 or SB 705 so that more solar energy projects can get off the ground in Pennsylvania.

HB 1970

PennCEF neither supports nor opposes [HB 1970](#). The bill, which allows PA ratepayers to pay more on their utility bills for the promotion of local solar generation, is not a community solar bill. As PennCEF is neutral with respect to HB 1970, commentary on its provisions will be short. However, we find it important to note what HB 1970 does not do:

HB 1970:

- Does not open up the community solar market,
- Does not allow business owners and residents to establish community solar projects on their property,
- Does not throw a lifeline to struggling farmers, as HB 531 would do, by expanding their opportunity to develop renewable solar installations on their land,
- Does not cut the red tape preventing landowners from utilizing their land as they see fit, by allowing them to go solar.

Conclusion

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on both of these bills.

PennCEF strongly supports the passage of HB 531. I am happy to respond to any questions from members of the Committee.

I can also be reached at the email address below.

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