

Senator Michael J. Barrett
Chair, Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy
Massachusetts General Court

Representative Thomas A. Golden, Jr.
Chair, Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy
Massachusetts General Court

June 25, 2019

Dear Chair Barrett, Chair Golden, and members of the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy,

As environmental, civic, affordable housing, health, faith, and business organizations representing tens of thousands of Massachusetts residents, we ask you to advance legislation to expand solar energy.

The amount of solar energy capacity installed in Massachusetts has increased more than 240-fold in the last decade.¹ Thanks to supportive state policies as well as the efforts of countless families, businesses, institutions and municipalities, Massachusetts is a national leader for solar energy, with thousands of residents employed in the solar industry. Because of solar, our air is cleaner, our families are healthier, and we're helping to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

For all of the progress we have made, we have still tapped only a small fraction of Massachusetts' solar potential. Unfortunately, policy barriers and inconsistencies have made it harder for many families, businesses, and local governments to switch to clean energy, putting Massachusetts at risk of becoming a laggard rather than a leader on solar.

Arbitrary caps on solar net metering continue to hold back solar development in many parts of the state. The caps on net metering have been reached in communities served by National Grid, Eversource (in Western Massachusetts), and Unitil. These caps particularly affect municipalities and businesses looking to install solar on their roofs or properties.

While the new SMART incentive program has allowed some solar projects to move forward, the program provides insufficient support for many categories of projects, including large rooftops, parking lot canopies, brownfields, and solar installations serving low-income communities. It is especially important that ratepayer-funded solar programs serve all customers, and the exclusion of low-income and environmental justice communities from the benefits of solar is a clear injustice. Most of the megawatts of solar energy that have qualified for the SMART program are for large

¹ *Renewables on the Rise 2018: A Decade of Progress Toward a Clean Energy Future*, Gideon Weissman, Rob Sargent, and Bret Fanshaw, Frontier Group and Environment Massachusetts Research & Policy Center, July 2018, <<https://environmentmassachusettscenter.org/reports/mae/renewables-rise-0>>.

ground-mounted installations that sometimes have a negative impact on Massachusetts' ecosystems, wildlife, and farmland.

These obstacles are having a measurable effect on solar energy in Massachusetts. Between 2017 and 2018, Massachusetts lost 1,320 jobs in the solar industry, on top of a decline of more than 3,000 solar jobs the previous year.²

Fortunately, there are many steps that Massachusetts can take to increase solar energy generation. For example, California recently adopted an innovative policy requiring new homes to be built with solar panels on their roofs.

We ask you to advance strong legislation to expand solar energy. We hope to see solar legislation passed this session that includes the following provisions. (The bill numbers reflect possible legislative language to implement these policy recommendations.)

Eliminate arbitrary obstacles standing in the way of solar energy development.

- Eliminate the caps on solar net metering. (H.2896, S.1955)
- If the caps are not eliminated, at least exempt solar projects from the net metering caps if they serve on-site demand or low-income or environmental justice residents or housing. (H.2866)
- Reform the interconnection process to provide more transparency to developers and limit delays. (H.2808, S.1932, H.3667)

Expand access to solar energy for environmental justice communities, low-income families, and renters.

- Allow owners of solar facilities to receive compensation for their energy as a direct payment from the utility to facilitate the allocation of net metering credits to low-income households. (H.2843, S.1956)
- Allow the benefits of solar projects to be accessible to all households in the Commonwealth. (H.2843, S.1956)
- Restore the full value of net metering credits for projects serving low-income and environmental justice communities. (H.2877, S.1931)
- Require future solar incentive programs to include a carveout for low-income families and renters. (H.2877, S.1931, H.2843, S.1956)

Maximize our solar energy potential by setting ambitious targets and expanding the market.

- Require solar on the roofs of new residential, commercial, and government buildings. (H.2825, S.1957, H.2895, S.1995)

² Solar Jobs Census 2018: Massachusetts, The Solar Foundation, <<https://www.thesolarfoundation.org/solar-jobs-census/factsheet-2018-ma/>>. Solar Jobs Census 2017: Massachusetts, The Solar Foundation, <<https://www.thesolarfoundation.org/solar-jobs-census-factsheet-2017-ma/>>.

- Allow cities and towns to enter into long-term contracts for solar energy on behalf of their residents and businesses, a policy known as Community Empowerment. (H.2853, S.1945)
- Encourage multiple buildings in a neighborhood to form cooperatives to purchase solar power as a single entity.
- Provide financial support for municipalities to install solar panels alongside other clean technologies like energy storage and electric vehicles, as proposed in the GreenWorks legislation. (H.3846)
- Increase the renewable portfolio standard to reach 100% renewable electricity, and accelerate the electrification of transportation and heating to enable all of our energy needs to be met with clean and renewable resources like responsibly sited solar. (H.2836, S.1958, H.2896, S.1955)
- Set a goal of getting 25% of Massachusetts' electricity from solar by 2030. (H.2896, S.1955)

Please take action to expand solar energy. We should do everything we can to tap into clean, local, limitless energy from the sun, and we should not waste time in doing so.

Sincerely,

Environment Massachusetts
 350 Mass for a Better Future
 Alpine Solar Heat and Hot Water
 Berkshire Environmental Action Team
 Berkshire Photovoltaic Services
 BlueHub Solar
 Boston Clean Energy Coalition
 Boston Climate Action Network
 Center for Sustainable Energy
 Clean Water Action
 Climate Action Brookline
 Climate Action Now, Western Mass.
 Commonwealth Green Low-Income Housing Coalition
 Cotuit Solar
 Dismas House
 Environmental League of Massachusetts
 Franklin County Continuing the Political Revolution
 Health Care Without Harm
 Heartwood Group, Inc.
 Mass Audubon
 Massachusetts Climate Action Network
 Massachusetts PipeLine Awareness Network
 Massachusetts Sierra Club
 Massachusetts Solar Owners Association

MassAmerican Energy LLC
MASSPIRG
MASSPIRG Students
MassSolar
No Fracked Gas in Mass
No Sharon Gas Pipeline | Clean Energy Now
North Quabbin Energy
North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership
Pegasus Renewable Energy Partners
Pope Energy
Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts
Resist the Pipeline
Resonant Energy
Self-Reliance Corporation
Solar Design Associates
Solar Energy Business Association of New England (SEBANE)
Solar Rising
South Coast Neighbors United
South Mountain Company, Inc.
Southcoast Energy Challenge
StopNED
Sunrise Boston
Suntility Electric LLC
Sustainable Framingham
Sustainable Sharon Coalition
Toxics Action Center Campaigns
Trinity Solar
Unitarian Universalist Mass Action
Vale Energy Services LLC
Vote Solar