

Solar is working for low-income communities

More than 90 leaders from organizations working in low-income communities, religious congregations, and universities call on state officials to expand solar energy and ensure its benefits are available to all

Wednesday, October 28, 2015

Dear State Leaders,

As community leaders, religious and spiritual leaders, community development organizations, academics, and researchers, we urge you to take immediate action to lift the net metering caps and maintain access to the benefits of solar for Massachusetts residents from all walks of life.

In recent years, solar energy has grown rapidly in Massachusetts, with major benefits for communities across the state. Solar is helping to reduce pollution, keep electricity costs under control, and boost the state's economy. Thanks to falling costs, innovative financing models and virtual net metering, solar is increasingly affordable and available to everyone. In fact, a preliminary analysis shows that almost 40 percent of residential solar systems are installed in communities with incomes at or below the state median of \$68,866, in addition to community shared solar or other virtually net metered projects that often serve low-income communities.

In particular, low-income communities are currently benefitting from solar energy in several ways:

- Solar is helping to reduce the carbon emissions fueling global warming, which threatens to have a disproportionate impact on low-income communities. Solar energy also decreases harmful forms of air pollution that affect public health, especially in urban areas and communities near fossil fuel facilities.
- Solar is good for our economy. Massachusetts' booming solar industry now supports more than 12,000 jobs. Job training programs like the Solar Energy Training Certificate Program at Roxbury Community College are helping residents of low-income neighborhoods obtain employment in the solar industry.
- Solar addresses energy affordability challenges by lowering and, often, fixing electricity rates for households. New models for community shared solar are expanding access to solar in communities of limited resources, enabling low-income families to enjoy the benefits of solar power even if they are not able to install solar on their rooftops. Community shared solar projects can offer discounts as high as 20% off retail electricity rates.

- Solar projects can benefit affordable housing developments by stabilizing operating budgets, which can keep rents from rising and maintain tenant programs and services.
- Solar energy also helps community organizations and food banks reinforce the social safety net and help more people. Every dollar saved by solar means more money is available to help those in need.
- Furthermore, solar energy has the potential to make electricity more affordable for everyone, including people who are not participating in solar projects. Solar can cut costs by reducing demand on the grid during times of peak electricity use and by avoiding the need to invest in transmission infrastructure.

Unfortunately, a limit on a key state solar program, net metering, will dramatically slow the growth of solar power unless you act soon to lift the cap. And recent proposals like Governor Baker's legislation would make drastic, unjustified cuts to the compensation available for solar power, making it harder for many, including residents of low-income communities, to access the benefits of solar.

We urge you to support the continued expansion of solar energy in Massachusetts and ensure that its benefits are available to all. Specifically, we ask you to immediately lift the caps on solar net metering, in order to enable stalled solar projects to move forward and to prevent major job losses. We urge you to continue providing full and fair compensation for the energy produced by solar projects, including community shared solar, and avoid creating minimum charges on electric bills that would disproportionately harm low-income communities. Finally, we encourage you to set a goal of getting 20 percent of Massachusetts' electricity from solar energy by 2025.

Solar is a clean, local, limitless resource that is playing a growing role in meeting Massachusetts' energy needs. Please support the continued growth of solar energy.

Sincerely,

[see attached]

Organizations

Donald Perry
Arise for Social Justice (Springfield)

Audrey Guhn
Baystate Brightwood Health Center (Springfield)

Rebecca Tumposky
Boston Climate Action Network (Boston)

Emily Rochon
Boston Community Capital (Boston)

Belen Power
Chelsea Collaborative (Chelsea)

Mark Liu
Chinese Progressive Association (Boston)

Susan Theberge
Climate Action Now

Yun-Ju Choi
Coalition for a Better Acre (Lowell)

Debra Fastino
Coalition for Social Justice

Gail Latimore
Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation (Dorchester)

Lynn Benander
Co-op Power

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Tom Osdoba
Enterprise Community Partners

Tracy Hutchinson
GAAMHA (Gardner)

Dr. Mathilde Castile
Hector Reyes House, Latin American Health Alliance (Worcester)

Sophie Abrams
Island Housing Trust (Vineyard Haven)

Janelle Wilson
Jeremiah's Inn (Worcester)

Amy Schectman
Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly

Bob Van Meter
Boston LISC

Joe Kriesberg
Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations

Reverend Tiffany Curtis
Mothers Out Front

Elena Letona
Neighbor to Neighbor

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Oak Hill CDC (Worcester)

Ron Hayes
The Bridge of Central Massachusetts (Worcester)

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Matt Feinstein
Worcester Roots Project (Worcester)

Religious and Spiritual Leaders

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B'nai Or of Boston

Mariama White-Hammond
Bethel AME Church (Boston)

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Common Street Spiritual Center (Natick)

Reverend Meredyth Ward
Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts (Springfield)

Reverend Victoria Alford Guest
First Congregational Church in Natick

Reverend Daniel Smith
First Church in Cambridge, Congregational UCC

Reverend Jeffery Barz-Snell
First Church in Salem, Unitarian

Reverend Wendy L. Bell
First Parish in Malden

Reverend Noah Evans
Grace Episcopal Church (Medford)

Reverend Fred Small
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Sisters of St. Joseph

Sister Maryann Enright
Sisters of St. Joseph

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Reverend Julie Carson
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Father Robert VerEecke S.J.
St. Ignatius of Loyola Parish (Chestnut Hill)

Reverend Steve Garnaas-Holmes
St. Matthew's United Methodist (Acton)

Reverend Dr. Christian Brocato
St. Peter's Episcopal Church (Cambridge)

Rabbi Van Lanckton
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Temple Hillel B'Nai Torah (West Roxbury)

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Rabbi Daniel Berman
Temple Reyim (Newton)

Rabbi Shoshana Friedman
Temple Sinai (Brookline)

Reverend Reebee Girash
The Eliot Church of Newton, UCC

Reverend Susan Brecht
The Eliot Church of Newton, UCC

Reverend Gregory Groover
The Historic Charles Street A.M.E. Church (Dorchester)

Reverend Anne Brancroft
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Reverend Nathan Detering
Unitarian Universalist Area Church at First Parish in Sherborn

Reverend Heather Concannon
Unitarian Universalist Area Church at First Parish in Sherborn

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Academic Professionals

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