Support Efforts to Remove Virginia’s Anti-Competitive Solar Policies

Dear Members of the Virginia General Assembly:

As medical and health professionals, and public health advocates, we are writing to ask you to support efforts to remove Virginia’s anti-competitive solar policies that inhibit the growth of distributed solar energy in the state. While Virginia made more progress in solar installations in 2016, the state still ranks well below most other states in the region, with a per capita solar capacity of only 29 watts per person. By comparison, North Carolina’s per capita capacity is 324 watts, New Jersey’s, 236 watts, and Maryland’s, 119 watts.

Removing Virginia’s anti-competitive solar policies would benefit the state’s economy and the health of its residents. In 2017, there were more people working in Virginia’s solar industry than its coal industry. These are good-paying jobs that support local economies throughout the Commonwealth. Improving Virginia’s business environment for distributed solar would create even more local jobs throughout the state. More good-paying jobs will help improve the health outcomes for Virginia residents, a primary concern of our organization. In addition to supporting local jobs, increasing the use of solar and other clean energy means less dirty energy sources, resulting in public health benefits such as fewer serious cases of asthma and other respiratory diseases, as well as lower risks of heart attacks and strokes, among other benefits.

In light of these benefits, we ask you to:

1. **Protect access to net metering.**

   Net metering allows homeowners, businesses and government entities to receive fair value for the energy they produce with on-site solar. Net metered solar benefits utility customers by providing power when and where it’s needed most while increasing the resilience of the electric grid. We urge your support for legislation that broadens net metering access by removing Virginia’s one percent net metering cap and maintaining the full retail value.

2. **Enable Virginia to develop and benefit from real community solar projects.**

   Community solar enables Virginians who are unable to install solar on their own roofs to benefit from off-site solar projects. Real community solar – in which residents and businesses can develop their own shared-solar projects – is still illegal in Virginia. The most recent legislation allows only electric utilities to own community solar projects.
3. **Allow Virginians to lease solar panels through Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs).**

Power Purchase Agreements provide an opportunity for people without upfront capital to lease solar panels for their homes or businesses. The process is similar to leasing a car.

4. **Remove red tape on solar projects’ size and other limitations.**

Net-metered residential solar projects are currently limited to 20 kilowatts, and utilities can apply to impose standby charges on systems larger than 10 kilowatts. Utilities should not be able to impose unfair standby charges and size limitations. These are anti-free-market restrictions that are designed to protect the utilities’ monopoly on electricity production.

As the legislative session approaches, we will follow up with you on more specific actions that you can take on the issues raised in this letter.

Thank you for considering our concerns about Virginia’s anti-competitive solar policies.

Sincerely,

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1 Distributed solar refers to electricity that is produced at or near the point where it is used. Distributed solar energy can be located on rooftops or ground-mounted, and is typically connected to the local utility distribution grid.


5 The Virginia law that caps net metered solar at one percent of a utility's electric sales mostly serves to discourage distributed solar. Figures on how much net metered solar currently exists in Virginia are difficult to obtain, but industry experts say the state is nowhere near the one percent limit. See [https://powerforthepeopleva.com](https://powerforthepeopleva.com) for more information.