

Testimony in Favor of HB 818

Thank you Honorable Chair and Delegates,

I am Shan Gordon. I live at 602 Hollen Road in Baltimore, MD and I am President of MD Energy Savers. As part of my business, I help people reduce their energy costs and carbon footprint by enrolling in Maryland's Community Solar Pilot Program.

I am testifying in support of HB818. This bill will improve the Maryland Community Solar Program so the benefits of this program will finally become available to the households which need it the most.

I support Maryland's Community Solar Pilot Program. It helps support new renewable energy in Maryland and reduces pollution and energy bills for Maryland residents.

My favorite feature is that it reduces the costs of electricity for low or moderate-income residents by up to 25 percent. The thirty or forty dollars a month a typical low or moderate-income resident could save through Community Solar can be a big deal for households struggling to get by.

The only problem with this program is that many of the low-income families who need the program the most-- are not able to benefit from it.

Enabling Community Solar subscribers to enroll in community solar while keeping their billing on BGE would eliminate four obstacles that are keeping many residents from benefiting from this great program.

Obstacle 1: Residents must have a credit card or bank account to enroll in Community Solar. *Many residents at the bottom rung of the economy do not have bank accounts or credit cards, so they have been excluded from the program.*

Obstacle 2: Residents must agree to have automatic payments withdrawn from their accounts. *For residents with a few dollars in their accounts, automatic payments can easily overdraw their balance and generate an overdraft fee, wiping out the savings they would have gotten from the Community Solar Program.*

Obstacle 3: Residents are rightfully wary of switching to third-party energy companies. *Some companies have promised savings or green energy to residents and then greatly increased the cost of energy to these residents. Enabling residents to keep their billing with BGE reduces this fear and increases the likelihood that low-income residents will enroll in the Maryland Community Solar Pilot Program.*

Obstacle 4: Because energy assistance is paid to the utilities, signing up for community solar can reduce or eliminate energy assistance that they would otherwise receive.

I volunteer at Cares, a local food and assistance program in Baltimore, where I help low-income people apply for energy assistance. Most of them are seniors, receiving small social security payments, others are unemployed or receiving very income.

These are the very people who should be benefiting from this program, because of these problems, the director of the program has asked me to stop enrolling their clients in Community Solar Program.

Here is a case in point. I enrolled a client in a Community Solar project last year. But when the project was connected to the grid, there was a delay in the billing and two months of charges were deducted in one week from her bank account. This overdrew the funds in her account and her bank charged her a \$35 dollar overdraft fee. This sweet lady was in tears. I paid her overdraft fee, but if she had been able to keep her billing with BGE, she would have been able to benefit from this program without the turmoil and distress she experienced.

Today is a great day to make this small change. Allowing low and moderate-income residents to keep their billing with BGE when they enroll in Maryland's Community Solar Program will make a big change for the program and the people who need it the most.

Thank you very much,

Shan Gordon
602 Hollen Road,
Baltimore MD 21212
410-336-8239