

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: SB0613 – Electricity - Community Solar Energy Generating Systems Program
Organization: Individual
Submitting: Deborah Cohn
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 28, 2023

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing my testimony today in support of SB613. I reside in Bethesda and currently subscribe to a community solar project. I urge you to vote favorably on SB613.

“Greening” our electricity grid is critical to meeting Maryland’s climate goals and reducing air pollution that is deleterious to our health. Since 2017, the Community Solar Pilot Program has been an important part of Maryland’s transition to clean, green energy. My husband and I considered rooftop solar but found out that our roof was not appropriately oriented and was shaded by so many trees that rooftop solar was not economically viable. So, we subscribed to community solar.

By subscribing to community solar, we helped ensure construction of a solar power source that would supply our local grid, unlike purchasing wind RECs which at best supports green energy sources from outside our grid, and more likely represents only the resale of a certificate investment, i.e., a financial transaction. We receive one bill from the community solar provider and a second bill (with an offsetting credit) from our electric utility. We are grateful for this program which empowers us to contribute to addressing climate change while actually saving us money. We have encouraged friends and relatives to subscribe as well.

But we need to make the community solar program permanent and ensure that it is widely available to low and moderate income residents, particularly since they spend a much higher percentage of their financial resources on energy than higher income residents. We also need to require consolidated billing to make community solar financially viable for residents who qualify for energy assistance. SB613 does all of this.

SB613 would expand access to community solar by low and moderate income (LMI) residents by requiring at least 40% of the kilowatt-hour project output be reserved for LMI subscribers. By requiring utility consolidated billing, which places all energy charges on one utility bill, SB613 would allow families subscribing to community solar to apply any energy assistance benefits to their utility bill. Without consolidated billing, families must forego energy assistance when subscribing to community solar – a cruel choice.

SB613 also includes siting preferences that protect forests and encourage generation on developed land, including clean landfill sites, industrial areas, rooftops, and parking lots. Finally,

SB613 provides certainty to solar businesses and supports the State's solar energy workforce, while helping Maryland move closer to its solar generation targets.

For these reasons, I urge a **FAVORABLE** report for SB613 in committee.