



SB-613 Electricity – Community Solar Energy Generating Systems Program

**Testimony before
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 28, 2023
Position: Favorable**

Mr. Chair, Madame. Vice Chair, and members of the Committee, our names are Peter Alexander and Ruth Auerbach, and we represent the 750+ members of Indivisible Howard County. Indivisible Howard County is an active member of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members). We are writing in support of SB-613, Community Solar Energy Generating Systems Program. We are grateful for the leadership of Senator Brooks and Chair Feldman, and several colleagues for sponsoring this bill.

Electricity generated from the sun and wind is integral to Maryland's efforts to combat climate change. To continue to grow our solar capacity and expand access to affordable solar energy for all Marylanders, the General Assembly should make permanent our state's successful "Community Solar" pilot program.

Community Solar was established as a pilot program by the Maryland General Assembly in 2015. It enables Maryland households who are unable to install their own solar photovoltaics (PV) access to solar energy. It expands solar capacity and benefits the entire community by enabling Marylanders to purchase low-cost electricity from small solar projects. More than 60 community solar projects have been established, serving more than 10,000 Maryland families. The program has created a robust industry and good jobs, including here in Howard County.

The Community Solar pilot program expires in 2024. It will stop taking applications for new projects this year. We need HB908 to make Community Solar a permanent program. The bill will also:

- Remove the current cap on the number of projects
- Require future Community Solar projects to include at least 40% low- and moderate-income subscribers.
- Allow Community Solar charges to be billed to subscribers through their utility bills, just as utilities do with other non-utility electricity suppliers. (Currently, Community Solar bills are separate from utility bills, which can complicate payment by low-income households due to restrictions imposed by payment assistance programs).

One of us, Ruth Auerbach, subscribed to Community Solar in 2021, supplementing the PVs on her roof, which only produce 40% of her electricity needs. She pays 10% less for Community Solar electricity than BGE. She appreciates the Community Solar program and would like it to be available to others. The consolidated billing would also be helpful in simplifying her monthly bills.

We respectfully urge a favorable committee report.

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