February 27, 2024

To: House Economic Matters Committee

Re: **HB1407**: Electricity- County Tier 1 Renewable Sources – Generating Systems, Capacity, and Generation – Prohibition, Studies, and Plans - **Favorable**

Dear Members of the Economic Matters Committee of the Maryland General Assembly:

My name is John Miller. I live in Woodstock, Howard County, Maryland. I represent Chaberton Energy, a local Maryland based renewable energy developer with offices at 1700 Rockville Pike, Suite 305, Rockville, Montgomery County, Maryland. Chaberton Energy was built upon the framework that the State set up with the Community Solar Program. In nearly four years, we have grown and now employ 45 people, with 18 located in Maryland. We have multiple solar projects operating in Maryland, as well as a robust pipeline of projects in construction and development.

I have worked in solar energy for nearly 15 years, doing residential, commercial, utility scale, and, for the last 8 years, Community Solar. I have developed dozens of projects throughout the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and the Mid-West.

The Projects we develop deliver real and tangible benefits to your constituents, the residents of Maryland. We are able to save homeowners an average of $150 per year on their utility costs; each Community Solar project supports well over $2.5M in savings for subscribers. These savings increase even more for Low to Moderate Income (LMI) subscribers. As an industry, we support ensuring the benefits of solar energy flow to those who need it most. The energy bill savings we can offer to LMI subscribers provide a necessary lifeline to those struggling with increased energy costs.

These projects also support Maryland by delivering additional tax revenue to the State and its counties. Each project will deliver hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not over a million dollars, in tax revenue, all while not requiring any local services or costs. While delivering tangible financial benefits, these projects also provide significant environmental benefits to support Maryland's efforts to being a leader on climate change. Based on the EPA's Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator, a typical 2 megawatts ac project offsets carbon emissions by ~3,700 tons of CO_2 per year, compared with electricity generated from traditional sources. This is equal to the emissions of over 3.7M pounds of coal burned, over 3.8M miles driven by gasoline powered cars and is equal to the same amount a carbon captured by nearly 4,000 acres of local forests. That is all for a single project!

Maryland offers a unique challenge in terms of permitting projects. Many developers who are not located in, or are experienced in developing projects in Maryland, are unable to navigate the permitting process. Furthermore, with only 16 of the 23 counties in Maryland primarily served by a utility that participates in the Community Solar program, this leaves a limited amount of area to develop solar projects. Since the Community Solar program began, the area available for development has been reduced as several counties enacted total prohibitions on solar development, whether through temporary moratoriums, permanent/outright bans, or via intensively restrictive constraints on solar development as compared to other similar types of land uses. There are also multiple instances of projects meeting all local guidelines and ordinances, only to be denied by the County for apparently arbitrary reasons. Complicating the picture further, much of the area in those Counties with a more practical approach is rapidly becoming no longer viable for future solar projects due to a lack of grid capacity given the existing solar generation already in place. This has led to an inequitable distribution of certain counties shouldering a much larger portion of the State's goals while others continue to fall further behind.

The most recent report on the Renewable Portfolio Standard shows that the State is behind in meeting its energy goals. Specifically, per the latest report for 2022, the State only met ~55% of its obligations of the solar-carve out, which led to over $80M in penalty payments levied on the utilities. The solar carve-out is scheduled to increase significantly from 5.5% for 2022 to 14.5% by 2023, and based on current projections the State will continue to fall further behind on meeting these goals. As a Maryland based developer, who operates in Maryland, a primary reason for this deficit is due to local permitting prohibitions and restraints. We simply are not going to be able to keep up with the increasing RPS goals, and most likely are going to continue to fall further behind, unless we are able to get these projects permitted.

We commend Chair Wilson's efforts to identify solutions to this growing problem.

Community Solar is about more than the financial and environmental benefits; it is also about land preservation, landowner rights, free market competition for electricity, and energy choice for all Marylanders.

In order to keep building on the successes of Maryland, and to keep fostering jobs for a strong local economy, stimulating tax revenue, saving the people of Maryland money on their energy bills, supporting energy equity to LMI residents, and providing energy choice to all residents, it is imperative that there is a path to get local solar projects permitted and approved. We ask that the Economic Matters Committee issue a favorable report on HB1407.

Respectfully Submitted,

John Miller
Chaberton Energy