

TESTIMONY FOR HB0300

School Buildings - Solar Technology - Solar Panels on Schools

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Bhandari
Committee: Appropriations
Organization Submitting: Lower Shore Progressive Caucus
Person Submitting: Jared Schablein, Chair
Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB0300 on behalf of the Lower Shore Progressive Caucus. The Caucus is a political and activist organization on the Eastern Shore, unaffiliated with any political party, committed to empowering working people by building a Progressive movement on the Lower Eastern Shore.

Projects for the construction of new schools and renovations for existing schools are suddenly saturated with funds due to the passage of the School Construction Law two years ago. It would be absolutely foolish to construct a new school or replace the roof of an existing one without solar panels being installed in considering the financial incentives available, the expected increase in the cost of fossil fuels, and the necessity to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, it conveys the incorrect message to the state's youth that we are incapable of acting in our own best interests.

As far as incentives for installing solar panels, the Climate Solutions Now Act passed last session provides additional funds to build net zero schools which would require rooftop solar. The Inflation Reduction Act also authorizes solar tax credits available to tax-exempt groups like schools, and funds for the EPA's clean schools program will be available soon. Then there is alternate school finance, power purchase agreements, community solar, and involvement in demand response programs, all of which schools can research.

The economic benefits of solar on school budgets due to the anticipated long-term rise in the cost of fossil fuels are adequate reasons for investing in this technology. In addition, teaching science and career technology education students about solar energy will help prepare a workforce for the decarbonization of structures that we have already mandated to implement.

Installing solar in schools, in the viewpoint of our members, is one strategy to incentivize and increase the production of solar energy by the state. We also wish to encourage the use of energy storage, which will improve schools' resistance to power outages and assist mitigate grid management concerns caused by solar energy becoming operational. Last but not least, we support requiring IAC to establish a clearing house so that details on solar incentives, tax credits, alternative financing, etc. can be easily accessible.

It is for these reasons the Lower Shore Progressive Caucus supports this bill and recommends a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.