

Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

February 27, 2023

RE: Please pass SB0613 to make the community solar program permanent

Dear Chair Feldman,

ECA Solar respectfully submits this testimony in support of SB0613- community solar legislation currently before the Maryland State Legislature. The current Maryland Community Solar Pilot Program has brought local benefits to landowners, cities and towns, workers, and it has opened the door for thousands of residents and businesses to support local solar and save money on their electric bills who previously lacked access to affordable solar power. Over the last seven years the PILOT program has been expanded, revised, and improved. The passage of SB0613 and the implementation of a permanent community solar program will allow the State to reap long term benefits of the work that has been completed. A delay in implementing a permanent program will create a gap that will slow and kill development.

ECA Solar develops, engineers, installs, and operates large scale solar facilities across the US. ECA Solar takes an institutional approach to the solar energy industry. Our goal is to deploy the highest quality of solar power and energy storage projects to diversify the electric grid, while remaining risk averse and prioritizing safety. We value diversity and creativity to achieve the common goal of making solar energy more accessible to everyone. We're proud to have developed hundreds of acres of ground - mounted solar and over 6 million square feet of rooftop solar in 7 states.

Community solar provides direct customer savings, increases grid resiliency, provides direct grid benefits, and of course increases the clean energy supply, helping Maryland to reach its ambitious goal of having 50% of electricity come from renewable sources by 2030 with a 14.5% solar carve-out. The passage of SB0613 will allow Maryland to continue to be a clean energy leader and it will vastly expand access to solar with a special focus towards those most affected by climate change, low-income and disadvantaged communities.

Community Solar Achieves Clean Energy and Equity Targets

The State of Maryland set a 50% clean electricity supply goal by 2030 with a 14.5% solar carve-out. In doing so, the State has recognized the social and economic value of clean electricity. As of the summer of 2022 the Pilot program¹ has led to 150 MW of solar capacity in operation or development with much more in the queue. The expansion of the program through the passage

¹ COMAR 20.62.03

of SB0613 ensures that the market growth seen since the implementation of the Pilot program will continue for years to come.

Community solar grants all residents and businesses the opportunity to save money on their electric bills, even if they are not able to invest in installing their own solar panels. The savings provided helps to reduce the energy burden on all community solar customers, but particularly benefits low-income community solar customers. According to the PSC's Report on the Community Solar Energy Generation Systems Pilot Program LMI subscribers in have seen an average discount of around 23%. Furthermore, NREL's analysis of two Community Solar programs- the Massachusetts and Washington, D.C. programs, found direct reductions on the energy burden for the lowest income households as a result of participating in community solar, resulting in an energy burden reduction of 3.2 percentage points for the lowest income households in Massachusetts, and a reduction of 4.7 percentage points for the lowest income households in D.C.² Community Solar delivers direct, individual benefits for customers, as well as larger system and societal benefits with the expansion of clean, distributed generation.

Community solar has so far proven to be a critical part of reaching ambitious clean energy goals, providing direct grid benefits and customer savings. It is a win for all, and we hope that you will support the passage of SB0613 to expand clean energy and direct savings to Maryland ratepayers. Thank you for your consideration of this testimony, if you have any questions, please reach out to me at ko@ecasolar.com.

Sincerely,

Kaitlin Kelly O'Neill
Director of Policy
ECA Solar

² Heeter, Jenny, et al. *Sharing the Sun: Community Solar Deployment, Subscription Savings, and Energy Burden Reduction*. 2021. NREL, <https://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy21osti/80246.pdf>.