

LIGHTSTAR

February 29, 2024

Senator Brian Feldman, Chair
Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Testimony on SB783, An Act concerning renewable energy – net energy metering aggregation, solar Renewable Energy Credits, and taxes on Solar Energy Generating Systems (Brighter Tomorrow Act)

Dear Chair Feldman and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on Senate Bill (SB) 783, the Brighter Tomorrow Act. **Lightstar Renewables, LLC (Lightstar) supports this proposed legislation**, which will ensure that a variety of important improvements are made to solar energy policy in Maryland.

Lightstar develops, builds, and owns community solar projects with more than 1000 megawatts (MW) of projects completed or in development across the country. Of that 1000 MW portfolio, nearly 300 MWs are agrivoltaics (the integration of agricultural and/or horticultural production and solar on a single parcel of land). In Maryland, we have 47 MWs of agrivoltaics under development across approximately 9 landowners/farmers and 7 counties. Lightstar is diligently working with Maryland's county leadership and other policy stakeholders to communicate the benefits of preferred siting methods like agrivoltaics. Our mission is to build solar for both the land and the community. Lightstar is focused on community solar development that is built with ecological and agricultural needs at the forefront, which we believe is key to the next phase of securing energy independence and meeting clean energy goals.

In short, SB783 would allow aggregated net metering up to 5 MW, exempt certain preferred siting solar from valuation and/or property tax, create a payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) option for counties and developers to value ground-mounted projects for real or personal property tax, extend the property tax exemption for preferred siting community solar (including agrivoltaics), and would create a SREC multiplier for certain types of solar for the next four years. Lightstar appreciates these proposals and everything this bill aims to accomplish for the solar industry, particularly as it relates to support for preferred community solar siting. If passed, SB783 would improve opportunities for preferred siting projects, including rooftop solar, brownfields, and agrivoltaics. These siting mechanisms make the most efficient use of development space, have fewer visual impacts, and provide additional benefits to low- and moderate-income people. In particular, agrivoltaics presents a unique opportunity to incentivize preferred siting, especially in rural Maryland and could benefit from additional policy support.

The provision to extend the property tax exemption for preferred siting community solar (including agrivoltaics) to 2030 is essential. To our knowledge, there have not been any



agrivoltaics projects that have qualified for the property tax exemption, which per the current legislation the deadline for application for exemption is December 2024. Developers are not able to meet the 2024 deadline because the timeline for the exemptions do not line up with the opening of the permanent program, but on a more granular level administrative and permitting timelines are very long in Maryland. In Maryland specifically, agrivoltaics projects take, on average, 28 months to permit. Extending this incentive for preferred siting would enable developers to actually take advantage of agrivoltaics exemptions in particular.

Most importantly, SB783 would help alleviate critical financial barriers to developing preferred siting community solar and would encourage other developers to pursue this more challenging siting method. For these reasons, Lightstar requests this Committee's support of SB783, the Brighter Tomorrow Act. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to provide our input on this bill. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions on our testimony or wish to discuss this bill any further.

Sincerely,



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