

LIGHTSTAR

March 4, 2025

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

**RE: SB 983 – Public Utilities - Distributed Generation Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity,
Favorable testimony**

Dear Chair Feldman, Senator Brooks, and members of the Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee:

Lightstar Renewables LLC (Lightstar) provides this written testimony regarding Senate Bill (SB) 983. Lightstar's position on this legislation is favorable.

Lightstar develops, builds, and owns community solar projects with more than 1200 megawatts (MW) of projects completed or in development across the country. Of that 1200 MW portfolio, 500 MWs are agrivoltaics (the integration of agricultural and/or horticultural production and solar on a single parcel of land). In Maryland, we have 132 MWs of solely agrivoltaics projects under development across a variety of 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 protecting valuable farmland.

We are grateful to this Committee for supporting the passage of House Bill (HB) 908 in 2023, which made community solar a permanent program in Maryland and, most importantly, created a definition of agrivoltaics and the ability to co-locate these projects under specific circumstances. Because of that, we are able to offer farmers a unique solution to improve their financial viability and the opportunity to continue farming, especially by keeping tenant farmers on the land.

Senator Brooks' SB 983 would create a Distributed Generation Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (DGPCPN), that would improve the permitting process for qualifying community solar projects between 2 and 5 megawatts. The bill directs the Power Plant Research Program (PPRP) to develop standard siting and design requirements through a stakeholder engagement process and for the Public Service Commission to consider that input in establishing the regulations and application requirements for a DGPCPN. Finally, when processing a DGPCPN application, the Commission must ensure public comment opportunities are available and hold a public hearing.



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SB 983 would drive greater transparency, efficiency, and consistency in permitting community solar projects in Maryland. This would help Lightstar because we believe agrivoltaics projects must be sited responsibly and with a high bar for agricultural production. Ensuring that each project moves through the CPCN process in an efficient and thorough manner would ultimately save time and would appropriately protect farmers, farmland, counties, and landowners with responsible siting expectations.

Lightstar appreciates Chair Clippinger and Delegates Charkoudian and Fraser-Hidalgo for their leadership on SB 983 and their continued support for community solar. Lightstar also appreciates the Senate and House Leadership for taking up siting in SB 931 and HB 1036 which establish siting standards for solar and storage systems. SB 983 builds on the direction of the Leadership bill by providing a narrower solution specific to siting and administrative challenges for community solar projects that require (between 2-5 megawatts) a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity. This bill is an important next step to reducing barriers for community solar, including agrivoltaics, and achieving the energy and equity benefits of the permanent program.

Lightstar urges a favorable report on SB 983.

Sincerely,



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