

Testimony on: SB341 - Public Utilities - Solar Energy Generating Systems and Solar Renewable Energy Credits (Affordable Solar Act)

Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment

Submitting: Deborah A. Cohn

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 19, 2026

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Committee Members:

I have lived in Bethesda for over 40 years and have adult children and pre-school aged grandchildren who also live in Maryland. I am acutely aware of the difficulty many of their peers face in making ends meet, in part due to dramatic increases in utility bills. I also am concerned about the need for Maryland to provide our businesses a competitive advantage and to grow our economy so that we can address our structural budget constraints. I am submitting testimony in support of SB341, the Affordable Solar Act, because it addresses both of these concerns creatively and effectively and ensures that fees that ratepayers are required to pay are used only for their intended purpose. That's just a matter of simple fairness. And so I urge you to vote favorably on SB341.

Maryland is facing an affordability crisis for residents, governments and businesses, as utility bills continue to rise at a greater rate than inflation. Utility scale solar energy and onshore wind remain the [least expensive source of new electricity generation](#). With the Trump administration removing support for these clean, least expensive and fastest to deploy energy sources, states need creative, cost-effective ways to take advantage of these resources.

But Maryland's current system to encourage development of in-state solar energy (whether rooftop, community, commercial or utility scale solar) and cleaner electricity supplies, the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS), is broken. It is currently less expensive for utilities to meet the state's solar renewable energy certificate (SREC) requirements by paying the alternative compliance payment (ACP) into the Strategic Energy Investment Fund (SEIF) than to purchase SRECs. The Brighter Tomorrow Act was a bridge intended to deal with this problem. The Affordable Solar Act provides a long term solution to a broken RPS.

SB341 makes it easier and more cost-effective for residents and businesses in the state to utilize solar energy to reduce their utility bills. It incentivizes new commercial and utility-scale generation to increase reliability, lower the wholesale cost of electricity in the region, and delay the need for expensive new transmission capacity in Maryland. And it redirects existing SREC funds into a new fund to be used to fund in-state solar energy projects.

The Affordable Solar Act achieves this in three ways. The bill takes into account structures developed by New Jersey and other states to make their RPS more effective. SB341 restructures the RPS by directing the Public Service Commission (PSC) to create administratively determined incentive levels for SRECs. Incentives will be tailored according to market segments such as residential, non-residential, and community solar, ensuring that only the amount of incentive needed to induce additional supply in a particular market segment is provided. For utility-scale projects it directs the PSC to conduct a competitive procurement, effectively a reverse auction that will drive down the cost of the targeted amount of new supply to create value for the ratepayer. These efforts will spur 4,000 MW of new, in-state solar energy generation, reducing our dependence on out-of-state, often fossil-fuel energy supplies, while creating good paying Maryland-based jobs.

Second, SB341 creates a clean energy fund administered by the major utilities, and directs into this fund historical ACPs paid into the Strategic Energy Investment Fund. The new fund can only be used to build new, cost effective, in-state clean energy generation. In this way, funds that are paid by ratepayers to generate renewable energy investment can be used only to generate new renewable energy resources. Targeted fees that ratepayers are required under state law to pay through their utility bills should be used only for their intended purposes. That's just simple fairness.

Finally, SB341 allows for Portable Solar Energy Systems, allowing low and moderate income renters and condo residents to acquire easy-to-install solar energy systems without the need to obtain permits or interconnection agreements. These systems are widely used in Europe, UL listed for safety, likely to be available at big box stores and can be plugged into a standard 120v outlet with minimal safety protections. They provide limited amounts of power but give renters, condo owners and those who cannot afford rooftop solar some control over their utility bills at affordable prices.

The Energy Information Administration has just released a new [report](#), forecasting that solar, wind and battery storage will provide [over 99% of new electricity generating capacity](#) in the U.S. in 2026. The reason is simple: clean energy generation is the cheapest form of new generating capacity. Residents and businesses in states that pivot away from fossil fuels and other expensive forms of generation will reap the benefits of long term lower electricity costs.

To grow our economy, allow our businesses to compete nationally and internationally, and reduce utility costs for residents, I urge a favorable report on SB341, the Affordable Solar Act.