



House Public Utilities Committee  
Chairman Jim Hoops  
Opponent Testimony on HB 118  
Testimony of Becky Campbell  
Manager of Market Development, First Solar, Inc.

March 23, 2021

Chair Hoops, Vice Chair Ray, Ranking Member Smith and Members of the House Public Utilities Committee, good afternoon, my name is Becky Campbell and I lead First Solar's Market Development efforts throughout the eastern half of the country. Thank you for the opportunity to share First Solar's **opposition to House Bill 118**.

**First Solar's commitment to Ohio is longstanding and significant**

Born in Ohio in 1999, First Solar, America's Solar Company, powers communities, innovation, and prosperity with solar technology designed in America. First Solar is America's largest solar manufacturing company. With the biggest solar manufacturing footprint in the United States and the Western Hemisphere, we are the only American solar manufacturer to have shipped more than 25 gigawatts (GW) around the world, which is more than 200 million photovoltaic (PV) panels, and the only American company to rank among the world's ten largest solar manufacturers. Recognized as a trusted technology partner within the solar industry, 60 percent of all utility-scale installations in the US in 2019 featured First Solar modules – a testament to our product and the appetite for it here in the US. We employ more than 1,500 associates at good wages in our Perrysburg and Lake Township manufacturing facilities and are proud to partner with approximately 215 other Ohio businesses for supply chain support.

By staying focused on innovation and competitiveness, First Solar has weathered storms that have claimed other solar manufacturers while doubling down on our commitment to invest, manufacture, and innovate in Ohio. Since the company's birth, we've contributed well over \$3 billion to Ohio's economy and we've grown into a globally recognized leader in the solar manufacturing industry. Last year, First Solar manufactured approximately 1.9 gigawatts of solar panels at our Ohio facilities. However, that production continues to grow as we further invest in efficiency improvements in our process – our Ohio facilities are expected to produce 2.6 GW this year, which is equivalent to building roughly 10 new coal power plants per year. Northwest Ohio, the home of America's Solar Company, leads America in producing one of the most critical components for our country's energy transition – solar panels.



**First Solar is already benefiting from Ohio’s rapidly growing solar industry, but HB118 puts that at risk**

We appreciate the opportunity to share our concerns about House Bill 118. Our company has long anticipated the moment when the Ohio solar market would begin its growth trajectory. Over the last year, we’ve finally started to witness that growth. I can speak for myself and many of my colleagues – our team took great pride in supplying the panels to one of Ohio’s first large-scale solar projects. I personally attended the groundbreaking for the Hillcrest Solar project in Brown County, which took place just a little over a year ago. The excitement that day was palpable. State and local officials, regional chamber members, and project partners gathered to celebrate not only the large investment in that specific community, but also the launching point of what promises to be a significant economic development opportunity for the entire state of Ohio. Ohio University’s Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs recently projected that growth of utility-scale solar in Ohio stands to create more than 54,000 construction jobs, more than 600 full-time permanent operations jobs, and generate \$18 billion in economic impacts for the state. However, House Bill 118 puts future investments at significant risk.

**The OPSB process is one of the most rigorous in the country and giving residents a vote on projects would be unprecedented**

During proponent testimony, you heard from many supporters of this bill who claimed that local control of permitting is common in other states. Those statements were misleading and misrepresent how that local control is manifested. While several states rely on local officials to issue permits, I am not aware of a single state – anywhere in the country – that allows residents to vote on a project’s fate. In fact, in several states, including Indiana and Florida, there are Republican-sponsored bills that would move oversight away from localities and assign it to the state. This is because states are generally better resourced to thoroughly vet the safety and merits of these types of projects.

The OPSB process is one of the most rigorous permitting processes in the country. For a large solar project, applications typically consist of more than 100 pages of detailed documentation about the projects. Costly studies must be conducted and included before a project can even reach the point of applying. By the time an application is ready to be filed, a developer has often already invested upwards of \$1 million in a project. House Bill 118 would enable residents to throw away that investment by overriding the decision of the experts at the OPSB for any reason whatsoever.



### **HB118 would hold solar to a different stand than other energy technologies and would drive solar development and its accompanying economic benefits to neighboring markets**

A similar process is not in place for a single other form of energy generation in this state – not natural gas, coal, or even nuclear energy, where common practice today is on-site storage of nuclear waste. What makes solar so different from other technologies to warrant such an exception? Why would any solar developer be willing to risk more than \$1 million of initial investment with the threat of having it all thrown away by voters who have the ability to strip away a thoroughly vetted and approved OPSB permit? They absolutely won't – developers will shift their efforts to neighboring states if HB118 passes. Indiana, Michigan and Pennsylvania would all become much safer markets to invest in and Ohio – the home of America's Solar Company - would lose out on reaping the economic benefits of solar development, including the local jobs and tax benefits that go with it. Would First Solar still have ample opportunity to sell its technology? Sure, but likely not to projects that would further amplify the economic benefits of the solar industry within Ohio communities.

### **OPSB members possess unique expertise that makes them ideal for vetting these projects**

Furthermore, contrary to what proponents claimed, members of the OPSB possess unique expertise that enables them to assess the risks and merits of these complex projects. As you are well aware, the OPSB is made up of six appointed experts, each handpicked by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. The board also includes one representative of the public and four non-voting members representing the legislature. Who better to evaluate these types of projects? The permitting process also includes an opportunity for the public to offer comments and share concerns. In most of the public comment OPSB hearings that I've watched, few, if any, opponents have come forward to express concerns about a project.

**Again, contrary to what was shared in proponent testimony, it is free and accessible to participate in OPSB's public hearing process and opponents frequently do not show up.**

### **Contrary to proponent testimony, solar panels do not pose safety or environmental risks to communities**

Finally, I wanted to address some specific claims that were made by some of the proponents during their testimony. Statements were made that suggested that solar panels pose serious environmental and health risks to communities, specifically that they contain toxic materials that may contaminate the surrounding environment. This misperception, while not uncommon, is false and misleading. As you are likely very familiar, the internet is a treasure trove of misinformation – including on this topic. **What's important to understand is that**



these claims have been thoroughly proven to be false by credible researchers and scientists from all over the world. Most notably, scientists from our own U.S. Department of Energy National Laboratories have authored reports on this topic which speak to the safety of solar panels under a variety of conditions, including fires and end-of-life handling. As one of the world's leading solar manufacturers, First Solar takes safety and environmental responsibility very seriously. We are proud to have been recognized by Ohio EPA for our environmental excellence through its E3 Gold Award. I am a licensed environmental engineer and this is my field of expertise. If anyone in this committee would like to learn more, I would be happy to personally sit down and walk you through the dense body of scientific reporting on this topic. I would also be happy to show you the rigorous level of testing that all commercialized solar panels undergo to ensure their safety and reliability before being certified for use.

First Solar is proud to manufacture our advanced thin film solar modules in Ohio, and looks forward to further investing in this market by supplying our Ohio-manufactured solar panels to customers that plan to deploy them in the ground across the state. As America's Solar Company and the largest U.S. solar panel manufacturer in the Western hemisphere, First Solar hopes Ohio will work towards a sustainable and growing market for utility-scale solar. House Bill 118 would put this rapidly growing industry in serious jeopardy in Ohio and thus would directly impact First Solar's opportunity to supply its Ohio-manufactured technology to prospective projects. **For all of the reasons above, First Solar remains strongly opposed to House Bill 118.**

I appreciate your time and consideration today and would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Becky Campbell".

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