

Proponent Testimony by Linda New on House Bill 197

House Public Utilities Committee September 20, 2023

Chairman Stein, Vice-Chair Blasdel, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the House Public Utilities Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony on behalf of House Bill 197, a bill designed to encourage the development of community solar facilities in Ohio.

My name is Linda New. I am a member of the Executive Committee of Northeast Ohio Sierra Club, I am on the Board of Trustees of FaCT: Faith Communities Together for a Sustainable Future, and I am a member-owner of Cleveland Solar Cooperative, a cooperative business in Greater Cleveland developing community-owned solar arrays through current laws and net-metering. I am a teacher by profession, a naturalist by inclination, and an environmental steward - as we all must be if we hope to live in a safe, sustainable, and healthy world. Today I speak for myself as a constituent and life-long resident of Ohio.

Currently, most electricity in Ohio is generated by burning coal or methane. Even today, fossil fuels are extracted from the ground through extreme procedures like strip mining and fracking, putting our communities at risk by contaminating the soil, poisoning the water, and spewing particulate matter and toxins into the air. In the past few years, I've hiked hundreds of miles through Ohio's small towns and natural spaces, witnessing the destruction caused by hydraulic fracturing of our shale bedrock, seeing first hand the devastation left by strip mining, and hearing from Ohio residents about the urgent need for cleaner energy generation.

Ohio needs to move away from outdated, destructive fossil fuel extraction, and develop more sustainable and profitable sources of electricity. House Bill 197 would move us in this direction.

Industrial practices in Ohio have left behind abandoned, distressed stretches of land that cannot be redeveloped due to the presence of hazardous substances. These "brownfields" are often the remains of landfills, solid waste facilities, coal mines, industry, or hazardous material storage, and are often located near marginalized communities. House Bill 197 requires that at least 500 MW of allotted energy from community solar facilities be constructed on distressed sites, and provides some funding for brownfield remediation, addressing in part the damage that has been done to these areas.

HB197 increases access to clean energy in Ohio, it adds momentum to the much needed grid modernization in our state, it creates safe, well paid jobs in our communities, provides savings for consumers, and encourages the growth of Ohio-based solar panel manufacturing. HB197 would support the work of Cleveland Solar Cooperative as it invests in new arrays, provides benefits to member-owners, and keeps dollars in Ohio's economy.

There are good reasons for the bipartisan support of this proposed legislation here in Columbus and across the state. I encourage you to move this bill forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on behalf of HB 197.

Linda New