



Proponent Testimony by Dion Mensah on House Bill 197  
Outreach Coordinator, Black Environmental Leaders Action Fund  
House Public Utilities Committee  
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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 (HB 197), a bill to create a Ohio Community Solar Pilot Program. My name is Dion Mensah, and I am an Outreach Coordinator with Black Environmental Leaders Action Fund (BEL AF).

The Black Environmental Leaders Action Fund (BEL AF) is a non-partisan equitable policy/advocacy initiative formed to build the political power of Ohio's environmental justice movement through strategic issues and electoral campaigns. Founded in 2021, BEL AF partners with communities, local government entities, foundations, multiple sectors, and public health agencies to bring research, practice, strategy, and analysis to the pressing energy, health and climate equity concerns of the day. As the Columbus-based Outreach Coordinator, it is my duty to help connect with community members across the state to educate, advocate, and organize around critical issues relating to environmental, climate, and energy justice.

We at Black Environmental Leaders Action Fund come to you all today to testify in support of HB 197, which would love the Ohio Community Solar Pilot Program. The passage of HB 197 would allow for a the creation of a four year pilot, and in this time around 1750 MW Community Solar would be developed across the state. This large cap allows for many projects to be implemented throughout Ohio, and these projects can be placed with private or public entities.

23 states so far have passed legislation to launch some form of community solar, whether it'd be a pilot program similar to what's proposed with HB 197, or a full statewide implementation. It's time Ohio takes the necessary steps to begin to reap these benefits as well. While the pilot program would be temporary and call for reassessment after this time period, it is a chance to demonstrate the true benefits of community solar for Ohioans.

Community solar can be a pivotal tool for facilitating a just transition in our state. HB 197 would makes solar more accessible to renters, low-income communities, and anyone else who cannot have rooftop solar due to costs or other constraints. Black and Brown communities deserve to be able to participate and reap the benefits of clean, diversified energy. What's even better: community solar creates locally generated energy, and it creates new job opportunities.

According to the [2022 Powerless in the Pandemic report](#), Ohio is the state with the 5th most utility disconnections nationwide. Here in Franklin County, energy burden is as high as [10.7% in some places](#), meaning households are spending almost 11% of their average household income on energy costs ALONE. HB 197 would be an opportunity to reduce energy costs for Ohioans at



a time of heightened inflation, as community solar can lower utility costs by around 10%-20% each month, while also expanding generating capacity and supporting our grid.

HB 197's Community Solar Pilot Program gives Ohio chance to measure the benefits of expanding solar that is more accessible, creates jobs, supports our electrical grid, and reduces energy costs.

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