



House Public Utilities Committee
HB 197 - Proponent Testimony
Sarah Spence, Executive Director
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Chairman Stein, Vice Chair Robb Blasdel, Ranking Member Weinstein and members of the Public Utilities Committee: thank you for allowing me to provide proponent testimony for House Bill 197 (HB 197). My name is Sarah Spence, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Ohio Conservative Energy Forum (OHCEF).

OHCEF was founded in 2015 to advocate for a diverse, all-of-the above energy portfolio – one that includes not only existing sources of traditional energy generation, but one that also seeks to expand the development of renewable energy sources. OHCEF believes that a diverse energy portfolio can strengthen both our economy and our national security while providing unmatched opportunities for Ohio-led innovation and job creation.

The time is right for providing more Ohioans with more choices for renewable, homegrown and less expensive energy. We need to reduce household energy costs, shore up the reliability of an increasingly fragile power grid, and lessen the state's dependence on electricity imports, which serve as much as a quarter of consumer demand in Ohio. Simply put, Ohioans need more energy options. The good news is such options are available and can be produced right here in our home state.

HB 197 creates a new test market for energy production through a community solar pilot program.

Community solar provides the flexibility needed to meet Ohioans where they are in terms of solar energy needs. Currently, Ohio's residents, businesses and communities in investor-owned utility (IOU) territories only have the choice of rooftop solar or doing a power purchase agreement on utility scale solar. Community solar fills this gap and allows utility customers to enroll as subscribers to a community solar project, earning savings on their monthly utility bills in an amount that corresponds to their share of the electricity produced by the project, regardless of the physical attributes or ownership of their home or business. In other words, residents can choose to power their homes with solar energy even if it is not financially or logistically possible to place a solar array on their own homes or small businesses.



Community solar programs have the added benefit of drawing private investment dollars to areas outside of the traditional utility model which means more jobs, economic development, and tax revenue for local communities. A recent study from Ohio University demonstrates the economic benefits of community solar projects are very real. The researchers found that the Ohio Community Solar Pilot Program will create more than 27,000 jobs, about \$2.5 billion in employee earnings, and generate as much as \$410 million in local tax revenues over the 25-year life cycle of the solar projects.

These common-sense, economic benefits have conservatives across the country championing similar community solar legislation. To date, 21 states have passed legislation encouraging development of these programs. We also know from the experiences of these states with active programs that there are other advantages that come with community solar access - grid performance, statewide energy prices and local air quality have all improved. Efforts to expand consumer options are underway in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Michigan where conservative lawmakers have introduced bills that will remove the regulatory red tape in their states to authorize the development of small-scale community solar projects. We are happy to see Rep. Hoops and Rep. Ray leading the effort here in Ohio.

Community solar programs would be entirely voluntary under this bill. Ohioans will appreciate that this bill is neither prescriptive for consumers nor their local governments. Proposed community solar developments would already fall under approval through local zoning ordinances, so the bill merely provides consumers with the choice to opt-in to an arrangement in which they would earn passive income from the reliable and affordable electricity generated by their local resources.

HB 197 is common-sense legislation that supports the economic expansion of affordable, reliable, Ohio-based energy. Thank you again for allowing me to testify in support of HB 197. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.