

# LIGHTSTAR

April 24, 2024

Representative Dick Stein, Chair  
House Committee on Public Utilities  
1 Capitol Square  
Columbus, OH 43215

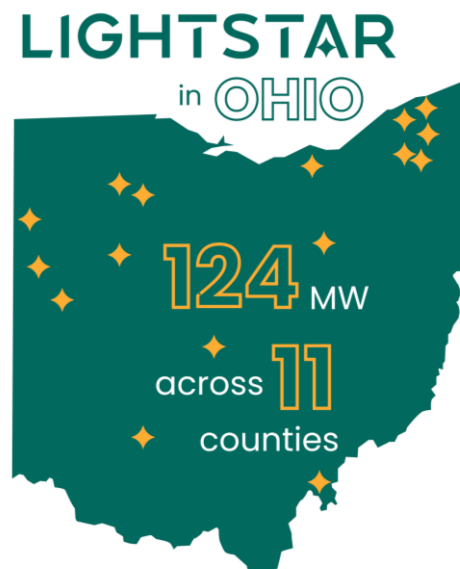
## Testimony on HB197, Establishing community solar pilot and solar development programs

Dear Chair Stein and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 197, *Establishing community solar pilot and solar development programs*. **Lightstar Renewables, LLC strongly supports this proposed legislation.**

Lightstar develops, builds, and owns community solar projects with more than 1.2 gigawatt (GW) of projects completed or in development in the United States and abroad. Lightstar is focused on community solar development that is built with ecological and agricultural needs at the forefront, which we believe is key to the next phase of securing energy independence and diversifying the grid in Ohio. Currently, the lack of community solar legislation that enables private participation in the market is hamstringing our ability to work with our landowners and farmers to bring our projects to fruition. This bill addresses this arbitrary limitation and enables market competition.

Lightstar has been active in Ohio since 2022. Our portfolio in Ohio currently consists of small community solar projects totaling 124MW distributed across 11 counties, representing enough combined energy output to power approximately 100,000 Ohioan homes and businesses. HB197 would enable us to bring these early-stage projects to fruition while providing a multitude of benefits for landowners, farmers, and consumers. These benefits are further described in our testimony.



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## **1. This bill will strengthen private property rights for Ohio farmers and landowners.**

Currently, private developers like Lightstar cannot participate in the community solar market and therefore cannot work with our landowners to move projects forward. This arbitrary hindrance is inadvertently punishing Ohio's land stewards by unreasonably restricting their private property rights to integrate solar on their land. Without this option, many landowners are forced to face the difficult choice to take their land out of agricultural production forever. Lightstar respectfully recommends that the Committee move HB197 forward today to allow landowners the flexibility to manage their land by partnering with private developers like Lightstar through the community solar market.

## **2. The bill will enable Ohio farmers and landowners to diversify their income and keep land productive.**

Lightstar is one of the few community solar providers that owns and operates all of our projects, and one of the first to offer landowners the opportunity to maintain the agricultural viability of their land through agrivoltaics. Agrivoltaics, or "AgPV", is the integration of agricultural and/or horticultural production and solar on a single parcel of land. Farmers have the continued use of their land through Lightstar's approach. Of our nationwide 1200 MW portfolio, nearly 300 MWs are agrivoltaics projects. HB197's maximum project size of 10MW represents a significant opportunity to integrate agrivoltaics.

Lightstar's approach to agrivoltaics emphasizes continued or new meaningful agricultural production, and usually includes market or commodity crops but may also include grazing operations incorporated into a robust farm logistics plan. Agrivoltaics potentially pair well with some of Ohio's largest agricultural products: tomatoes, pumpkins, bell pepper, and cucumbers, as well as various commodity crops. Lightstar's participation in the Ohio community solar market that HB197 would enable will help preserve the agricultural heritage of the state through agrivoltaics. Our farmers and landowners appreciate this innovative approach and recognize the tremendous benefits of agrivoltaics to their farm operations, including crop protection from wildlife due to agricultural fencing, frost protection, decreased water usage, increased yields on fruiting crops, and shade for farm workers.

Lightstar's agrivoltaic projects also give landowners the ability to diversify their income. We offer landowners the ability to lease a portion of their land for solar while also actively farming market or commodity crops within rows of panels, keeping the land productive and profitable. Landowners may also choose to lease a portion of the land for solar and allow that land to rest and regenerate while producing clean energy and remaining protected from irreversible development.

## **3. This bill will help protect Ohio's working farms from irreversible development and inefficient land use.**

By enabling a market for community solar, HB197 will strengthen the ability of Ohio's farming families and tenant farmers to continue to act as some of the state's best and most effective land stewards, especially at a time when development pressures are soaring. Lightstar is a proud partner of American Farmland Trust (AFT), and we actively work with them across the country in their holistic approach to land conservation and forward-looking farming practices with objective research and advocacy. AFT's "Farms Under Threat: The State of the States" report included spatial analysis of the extent, diversity, and quality of Ohio's agricultural land—and where this land has been converted to both urban and highly developed (UHD) and low-density residential (LDR) land uses. The report found that Ohio scored among the top states for the conversion of agricultural land to permanent

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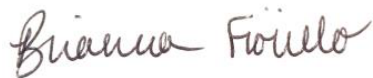
development. From 2001-2016, 213,200 acres of Ohio's agricultural land were developed or compromised.

A staggering 83% of land permanently converted was productive cropland or pastureland. Of this conversion, 65% was to LDR land uses, where scattered, permanent large lot development fragmented the agricultural land base and limited production, marketing, and management options for the working farms that remain. By partnering with Lightstar for community solar, farming families can keep their agricultural operations financially viable with creative solutions like agrivoltaics. In the case of tenant farmers, agrivoltaics represents an opportunity for new and first-generation farmers to learn new farming techniques with low financial risk.

In summary, Lightstar supports HB197 as an important bill that removes arbitrary limitations on community solar market participation, supports private property rights for Ohioans, and enables farmers the opportunity to keep land protected and productive through agrivoltaics.

We appreciate your consideration of our support for this bill.

Thank you,



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