

House Public Utilities Committee
Proponent Testimony on HB 197
Testimony of Marnie Urso
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April 24, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB 197 on behalf of Audubon's more than 48,000 members in Ohio. I am Marnie Urso, the Senior Policy Director for Audubon Great Lakes which is a regional office of the National Audubon Society.

Audubon supports H.B. 197 because it helps to put Ohio on a path to a clean energy future that the people, birds and wildlife in this state will need to thrive. Specifically, with H.B. 197, community solar will:

- Create new markets for solar, allowing for more equitable participation in the solar economy by eliminating barriers for individuals, businesses, and farmers who are currently shut out of the market.
- Offer the economic benefits of solar to everyone regardless of where they live, creating opportunities for families and businesses to lower and stabilize their electricity bills.
- Provide meaningful savings on utility bills, usually from around 5%-20%.
- Increase the supply of clean electricity coming onto the grid and help diversify Ohio's energy supply which will provide community solar neighborhoods, and utilities, more resiliency as extreme weather events become more common.
- Community solar projects also create real, local economic impacts, creating jobs and building wealth in the communities where the project is built, contributing to the 7,486 solar jobs already located in Ohio according to the Solar Energy Industries Association.
- Grow the \$3.1 billion investment in solar in the state and improve access to this important source of energy.

Ohio harbors some of the most important places of any Midwestern state for birds – our biodiversity plays an integral role in supporting over 400 species, either by being on their migratory path or by providing breeding habitat. From the prairies in the west, to unglaciated Appalachian plateaus to the south and east, and our great Lake Erie in the north—our state is critical to the health and vitality of birds and wildlife. In

addition to being important for the quality of life for Ohioans, birds are important pollinators for our agriculture industry and birds support local business.

Birds also tell us that we must take action to combat climate change. For decades, climate change has been one of our greatest conservation challenges and has become one of the leading threats to birds and other wildlife in Ohio. The National [Audubon Society's Survival by Degrees: 389 Birds Species on the Brink](#) has found that two-thirds of North American birds are at risk from climate change. Many of these species are currently threatened by other factors, such as habitat loss, while others are species we previously considered secure but could face significant shifts in their ranges as a result of climate change.

Now, more than ever, we have a responsibility to move forward and face this urgent threat head on by protecting the places that birds need to thrive and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Audubon strongly supports renewable energy – including solar, wind, and geothermal power – that is properly sited in ways that avoid, minimize, and mitigate negative impacts on birds and other wildlife.

As community solar will benefit birds, wildlife and people, we urge this committee to support H.B. 197 and help Ohio create a clean, sustainable and thriving future for all. Thank you again for the opportunity to present this testimony. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

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Audubon Great Lakes is a regional office of Audubon. The National Audubon Society protects birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow. Audubon works throughout the Americas using science, advocacy, education, and on-the-ground conservation. State programs, nature centers, chapters, and partners give Audubon an unparalleled wingspan that reaches millions of people each year to inform, inspire, and unite diverse communities in conservation action. A nonprofit conservation organization since 1905, Audubon believes in a world in which people and wildlife thrive.