

Good morning:

My name is Hannah Bent and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of ENGIE in support of HB 197, **which would establish a community solar program in the state.** ENGIE is one of the largest independent power producers in the world, with over 90,000 employees and innovative, low-carbon energy solutions for customers in over 30 countries. We have over one GW of installed renewable energy facilities in North America.

ENGIE provides affordable clean energy via community solar programs in five states around the country – all at a discount (between 10-20%) to what families and businesses would ordinarily pay for energy. What does this mean for customers? Subscribing to an ENGIE community solar garden would allow Ohio families to save on average an estimated \$10-20 dollars per month for a term of up to 25 years. A recent poll conducted by the Conservative Energy Network found that 67% of voters support community solar, including 60% of Republicans and 65% of Independents, making it a popular offering across for many different constituents.¹

In addition to direct cost savings to ratepayers, community solar has several other distinct benefits to consider, which we describe in more detail:

- 1) **Size and Scale.** Community solar projects are small and differ greatly from large, utility-scale solar installations. A typical community solar project fits on approximately 20 acres and can be strategically placed on a parcel to maximize its use. Often, projects can be tucked out of sight from major roads and neighbors or can be placed on marginal soils to add additional revenue for farmers. Hosting a community solar project can occur in tandem with traditional agriculture – crops can be interspersed with the panels or placed on an area of land not used or under-utilized for farming. As part of our normal development process, ENGIE creates pollinator habitat on all of our community solar projects. This means that the area between the panels is planted with a mix of native and pollinator friendly plants and grasses. We work with local seed distributors to create a mix that works well in the specific area where our facility is located. Adding pollinator habitat is cost-effective and we believe that it helps improve soil and aids in hydrology over time, which can be beneficial for the site's future use after the solar project has been decommissioned.
- 2) **Land Use & Farming.** Community solar can also help to keep farms in families. Our landowners are typically looking for an alternative use for their land other than or in addition to traditional farming. Rents paid by solar to landowners are consistent sources of income for up to 30-35 years. Once the project has reached the end of its life, the solar equipment is easily removed and the land returned to its pre-solar condition.
- 3) **Energy Independence / Energy Choice.** Voters in all parties believe it is important that the U.S. become energy independent, with nearly three-quarters (73%) of Republicans calling it “very important.”² Community solar will create a dispersed network of brand-new energy infrastructure *not* dependent on volatile global fuel markets. We will be able to connect projects to strategic areas of the grid to aid in grid performance and resiliency, and even provide upgrades to distribution system infrastructure where our projects will be interconnected. Such

¹ Conservative Energy Network Poll.

² Conservative Energy Network Poll.

updates are paid by ENGIE and other developers – not by ratepayers. These benefits extend to *all* ratepayers, not just subscribers to community solar projects.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Committee and Legislature more broadly to craft a sustainable community solar program that provides net benefits to Ohioans.

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