

Ohio Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee
Written Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 275
Green Energy Ohio
Tony Logan
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Chairman Reineke, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the Committee... thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of Senate Bill 275. My name is Tony Logan, and I serve on the Board of Green Energy Ohio (GEO).

Green Energy Ohio is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to advocating for sustainable energy policies, technologies, and practices throughout the state. Our rationale for this advocacy is not just the need for a cleaner environment—although that is a favorable result-- but also for the jobs and economic development benefits that flow from well- sited renewable energy projects and supply chain businesses. Next year will mark GEO's 25th anniversary of leadership in Ohio's renewable energy space.

GEO also serves as the statewide affiliate of the Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA), the national trade association for the solar and solar battery industries. Through this affiliation, we closely follow state level solar development challenges and opportunities throughout the country.

We're here today to support a promising new vehicle for small scale solar development in Ohio—Senate Bill 275. The Bill creates a system of virtual net metering (VNM) which allows a user in one part of the state to contract with a utility to utilize electricity generated elsewhere in the state. While VNM electricity need not be generated exclusively from solar or wind -- the Bill offers an 'All of the above' generation choice— the rapidly declining costs of wind and solar systems versus fossil fuel systems gives them a distinct market advantage.

To avoid the acrimony which unfortunately arises from solar and wind projects on leased farmland, the Bill restricts siting to "distressed land", defined to include landfills, commercial rooftops, brownfields, and abandoned strip-mined land. Senate Bill 275 anticipates smaller, rifle-shot projects tailored to a single commercial user. If these projects are sited on distressed sites and can avoid the cost of transmission lines, they may be able to sidestep many of the regulatory, permitting, and "NIMBY" pitfalls of larger utility- scale projects. Distressed lands are 'low hanging fruit' for commercial users and solar and wind developers and, if this Bill passes, deployment could occur quickly.

There is also an elegant symmetry to the notion of siting solar and wind projects on reclaimed strip-mined lands. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many towns in eastern and southern Ohio paid a steep price for extracting the coal beneath them. Water was often degraded, subsidence episodes became common, and much surface-mined land was rendered unsuitable for farming. Yet we owe these communities a debt of gratitude. For the past century, they've kept America's lights on.

Meanwhile, the benefits of an extractive, coal economy—the jobs and tax revenue—all but disappeared as the coal industry left many of those communities and the mines shuttered. But perhaps Twenty first century technologies like solar and wind can breathe new life into these struggling communities.

Much of the infrastructure necessary for feeding solar and wind generated electricity into the grid is still available on or near strip-mined lands. Back in the heyday of dragline shovels like Big Muskie and the Silver Spade, Ohio utility companies ran high-capacity transmission lines from their powerplants up to the coalfields to provide electrical power for those large behemoths. Much of this infrastructure still remains intact.

So, let's have at it. Pass S.B.275 during this legislative session and begin converting these “distressed” strip mined lands into renewable energy-powered profit centers for the former coal communities in Southeast Ohio. For a century, they've kept America's lights on; now let's return their favor with tax revenues and jobs from renewable energy.

If we as a state are serious about putting out the welcome mat for hi-tech businesses, data centers, and companies with renewable energy goals, we will need to site renewable energy projects throughout the state. Senate Bill. 275 will jump start this process. Please consider passing this bill during the remainder of this legislative session.

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