



Proponent Testimony by Cathy Cowan Becker
Ohio Sustainable Business Council
Senate Bill 247
Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee
December 3, 2024

Chairman Reineke, Vice-Chair McColley, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony in support of Senate Bill 247 (SB 247), a bill to establish a framework for the Community Solar Pilot Program and encourage community solar facility development in Ohio. My name is Cathy Cowan Becker, and I am testifying today on behalf of the Ohio Sustainable Business Council and as a longtime sustainability advocate in Central Ohio.

As you know, the demand for electricity in Ohio is growing. Amazon, Google, Meta, and other large tech companies are building data centers across the state and in Central Ohio. One of these Amazon data centers is being constructed across the main road from my house.

Many of these companies have said they want to power their operations with renewable energy. But it's not just big tech companies that want renewable energy. Many Ohio citizens and small businesses want to power their homes with solar.

Unfortunately, most residents and businesses cannot install solar directly on their own roofs. Small businesses often rent the space they work in or share a roof with other businesses, such as in a strip mall. If a business owner works out of their home, they may live in an apartment building or a condo where they don't own the roof. Even if a business does own the roof, it may be too steep or shaded by trees. Or they may lack the up-front funds to pay for an entire solar system.

That's where community solar comes in. Community solar allows people and businesses to buy into a solar project that is not attached to their home or business. They can use 100% renewable energy for a monthly subscription fee rather than installing an entire rooftop solar system.

SB 247 would create a pilot community solar program of 1500 MW in Ohio, of which 500 MW would be located on distressed sites. By prioritizing projects on brownfields and other distressed sites, the bill addresses environmental remediation while expanding clean energy access.

I am certain there is more than enough demand in Ohio for all 1500 MW of energy in this program. One of OSBC's members, Blue Rock Station, is a 40-acre sustainability center in southeastern Ohio. They teach solar classes and consult on solar projects around the state. They tell us that many of their residential and small business clients would sign up for community solar if it was available.

This pilot program would show that community solar can be done in Ohio, just as it has been done in 22 other states. It's time to allow everyone in Ohio access to this program.

Community solar would be great for Ohio's economy. A [study from Ohio University](#) found that this pilot program alone could contribute nearly \$3.49 billion in gross state product (GSP), 27,254 Ohio job years with total earnings of \$2.48 billion, and \$409.5 million in local tax revenue over its lifetime.

It would also be great for ratepayers, including small business. Community solar provides savings of 5-20% on utility bills.

Don't forget that First Solar, a leading solar panel manufacturer, is located near Toledo. An Ohio community solar program could be supplied with panels made right here in Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on behalf of SB 247. This bill represents a significant step forward in making renewable energy affordable, equitable, and accessible to all Ohioans while boosting economic and environmental outcomes. I am happy to answer any questions.