

Proponent Testimony for SB 247: Ohio Community Solar Pilot Program

Ohio Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee

December 3, 2024

Chair Reineke, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Smith, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 247, which establishes the Ohio Community Solar Pilot Program. My name is Mryia Williams, and I work for Solar United Neighbors, a nonprofit dedicated to empowering communities to benefit from renewable energy.

Senate Bill 247 provides Ohio households access to clean, affordable energy through community solar subscriptions. This program bridges the gap for those unable to install solar at their properties, ensuring that all Ohioans—regardless of income or homeownership status—can benefit from renewable energy.

Building a Resilient Energy Future

SB 247 enables the development of 1,500 MW of community solar capacity to power 250,000 homes. This pilot program is a critical step toward creating a diversified energy mix that supports Ohio's growth while addressing energy availability and grid stability concerns.

Community Solar could help to meet Ohio's increasing electricity demand as manufacturing facilities, data centers, and other energy-intensive operations rise. Unlike traditional energy generation sources, which take an average of seven years for approval, permitting, and construction, community solar arrays can be operational in approximately 18 months. This rapid deployment helps meet Ohio's immediate energy needs while reducing strain on the grid.

Guaranteed Savings for Subscribers

Community Solar provides direct, guaranteed savings to subscribers, offering bill credits tied to the utility's retail rates. These savings apply exclusively to the generation portion of a customer's utility bill, leaving distribution and transmission charges unaffected. Distribution and Transmission charges fund critical infrastructure like substations and power lines, ensuring grid reliability and resilience.

By focusing savings on the generation portion, SB 247 minimizes financial impacts on utilities while delivering meaningful savings to participants. This structure supports grid maintenance and stability while balancing the interests of subscribers, non-subscribers, and utility companies.

Equity and Access for All Ohioans

SB 247 also ensures equitable access to clean energy, especially for low-to-moderate income (LMI) families often excluded from traditional solar programs. The Solar For All (SFA) initiative,

supported by federal funding, aims to lower energy costs for LMI households and drive clean energy deployment in underserved communities.

In Ohio, SFA will be implemented by the Industrial Heartland Solar Coalition (IHSC) and the Ohio Air Quality Development Authority (OAQDA), both program applications rely on Community Solar being established in Ohio. While municipal electric companies and community aggregation could provide alternatives, these options are typically limited to larger cities, leaving rural Ohioans and customers served by investor-owned utilities (IOUs) without access.

If we truly want Solar For All to be *for all*, community solar must be available for every Ohioan, regardless of their zip code or utility provider.

Conclusion

Passing SB 247 will be a win for Ohio's families and economy. Community Solar will pave the way for a brighter, cleaner, and more affordable energy future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mryia Williams, Program Associate
Solar United Neighbors of Ohio