

Chair Holmes, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Rader, and members of the Energy Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 303. My name is Mryia Williams, and I serve as the Ohio Program Director for Solar United Neighbors Action, a nonprofit that helps Ohioans go solar together, join together, and advocate for their energy rights.

Ohioans are facing a simple but urgent challenge: **we need more energy, and we need it quickly.** Data centers, manufacturing, and household electrification are all increasing demand at a pace our existing system is struggling to match. Community Energy is one of the key common-sense solutions that puts new supply on the grid faster, on the distribution side, where people live and work.

And this is not a new or untested idea. **Twenty-three states already have legislation on the books to support community solar and community energy programs.** And this list is non-partisan, from Utah and South Carolina to Minnesota; it's a practical approach to bring distributed energy online quickly and affordably. Ohio should not fall behind when states across the spectrum are already putting this tool to work.

This isn't about theory. **This isn't just words on paper—it's a bill backed by real people.** From farmers who want to diversify their income by hosting projects, to renters and families who can't put solar on their own roofs but want to lower bills and contribute to Ohio's energy future. Community Energy is a "right fit approach", meaning areas can decide which generation source best suits their landscape and needs. Community Energy projects can also include **biomass, hydro, battery storage, or other sources.** Having a diverse energy supply strengthens our grid, supports Ohio businesses and consumers, and creates resilience close to home. Plus, Community Energy is a voluntary program, so consumers have the choice to participate and select where their energy comes from. **For subscribers, that means real bill savings and more control over monthly costs, a powerful benefit as Ohioans face rising energy prices..**

And because HB 303 is structured as a **pilot**, it builds in flexibility. We can start small, measure the results, and make adjustments if needed. This ensures the program adapts to Ohio's needs while minimizing risks.

It's also important to recognize Ohio's current energy mix. **Most of our electricity still comes from natural gas, with coal and nuclear making up much of the rest.** Community Energy isn't asking us to walk away from those resources. In fact, it complements them. Large baseload resources remain critical, but they take years to plan and build. Community Energy can deliver clean, reliable power in months, not decades. It helps balance the portfolio.

We know we face challenges in getting new power onto the grid. **The Ohio Manufacturers' Association recently warned that PJM's bureaucracy is slowing approvals, discouraging investment, and raising costs for ratepayers.** Projects that could already be delivering affordable power are stuck in line. **Community Energy avoids that red tape entirely by being**

built on the distribution system, not the transmission grid. This lets Ohioans move faster and save money on their electric bills, while avoiding the mistake of adding more bureaucracy through unnecessary siting restrictions.

Which brings me to one concern: the clause in HB 303 that would allow local jurisdictions to **ban projects**. These projects are small. They are distribution-scale, not massive transmission-tied plants. Landowners should be able to decide what goes on their own land, and communities that want projects should not have that choice **blocked**. Larger projects with transmission impacts deserve greater oversight. **But these small distribution projects should be encouraged — not made harder.**

I would also note that in HB 15, the legislature recognized the urgency of bringing new generation online, including through Priority Investment Areas and brownfield carve-outs. That same principle applies here. To meet Ohio's growing energy demand, we need policies that add supply quickly. We should avoid creating situations where state-level incentives point one way but local bans point another, undermining the goal of getting more generation on board fast.

Community Energy also keeps dollars circulating locally. It means local jobs, local tax base, and local resilience. And while big energy infrastructure often flows profits out of state, Community Energy ensures more of the benefits stay with Ohioans.

Community Energy also has support across the spectrum. **Late last year, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) voted unanimously in favor of community solar and agrivoltaics permitting for farmers.** That kind of bipartisan agreement shows how broadly recognized this policy is as a win for communities.

House Bill 303 ensures Ohio is ready to meet rising demand with speed, flexibility, and fairness. It gives our constituents more tools, it strengthens—not threatens—our broader energy portfolio, and it ensures that energy growth reflects the needs and opportunities of the people who live here.

I urge your support of HB 303, and I thank you for your leadership in bringing forward a bill that gives Ohioans a real stake in our energy future.

Appendix: Supporting References for HB 303 Proponent Testimony

Ohio Manufacturers' Association (OMA)

- Ryan Augsburger, "By ignoring structural weaknesses, grid operator PJM is harming Ohio," *Cleveland.com*, Sept. 23, 2025.
- Summary: OMA warns PJM delays are raising costs, discouraging investment, and blocking projects that could already be delivering affordable power.

American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC)

- Resolution in Support of Farming and Energy Production, adopted **December 2024**.
- Summary: ALEC voted unanimously to support community solar and agrivoltaics permitting for farmers, showing bipartisan recognition of these tools.

Canary Media

- Jeff St. John, "The country's biggest energy market struggles to reform amid soaring costs," *Canary Media*, July 28, 2025.
- Summary: PJM's interconnection backlog and rising costs continue to slow new generation, highlighting the need for faster, distribution-scale solutions.

NC Clean Energy Technology Center (NCCETC)

- *Where Community Solar Stands Across the States in Early 2025*, May 2025.
- Summary: 23 states have legislation enabling community solar/community energy; 44 states plus D.C. have at least one operational project.