



**Office of the Ohio
Consumers' Counsel**
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**Before
The Ohio House of Representatives
Energy Committee**

**Testimony on House Bill 303
(Establish Community Energy Program and Pilot Program)**

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On Behalf of the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

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Hello Chair Holmes, Vice-Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Rader, and Committee members.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on House Bill 303. My name is Nicholas Stallard, and I am the Legislative Liaison for the Ohio Consumers' Counsel. OCC represents Ohio's 4.5 million residential utility consumers.

OCC appears today as an interested party to H.B. 303. Over the past several weeks, we've appreciated the opportunity to work closely with the bill's sponsors, Representatives Hoops and Ray. We thank the Representatives for their accessibility, thoughtful engagement, and genuine interest in hearing and addressing concerns raised on behalf of Ohio consumers. Their willingness to collaborate has resulted in meaningful improvements to the bill and demonstrates a strong commitment to getting this right for Ohioans.

We agree that Ohio should pursue an "all-of-the-above" energy strategy that values reliability, diversity, and innovation— including community energy. This pilot program is an important step forward. It offers residential consumers and small businesses the opportunity to voluntarily participate in community-based energy projects that can provide savings on bills, help relieve strain on the electric grid, and potentially reduce the need for new power generation. The approach taken in H.B. 303- a small voluntary pilot- is a prudent and balanced way to test new ideas at a time when energy demand is increasing, and system reliability is more important than ever. The bill also holds potential to spur innovation and job creation in Ohio.

As an advocate for residential consumers, OCC focuses on how new energy programs will affect all consumers, including those who do not participate. The challenge is always to strike the right balance: enabling innovation and consumer choice without imposing unnecessary costs on non-participating consumers. The most recent version of H.B. 303 reflects significant progress in meeting that challenge.

We appreciate that the bill now:

- Requires participating developers or subscribers – not non-participating consumers-- to bear program administration costs. This helps ensure fairness.
- Directs the PUCO to establish rules to minimize direct and indirect costs to non-subscribing ratepayers. This provision provides important protection against cost shifting.
- Creates a robust review process after 48 months of the pilot, giving the Legislature and stakeholders an opportunity to evaluate the program’s costs, benefits, and overall performance.
- Removes the mandate that the PUCO set bill credits to guarantee a “financeable” market, ensuring that the PUCO retains discretion to set credits that are fair and evidence based.
- Maintains legislative oversight over any future expansion of the pilot, an important safeguard to ensure expansion occurs only after thoughtful review.
- Clarifies that the PUCO may continue to review and modify bill credits as needed to protect consumers –an essential measure of accountability.
- Requires each utility to establish its own net crediting program, recognizing that utility systems differ and that a one-size-fits-all approach may not serve consumers well.
- Extends the rulemaking timeline, allowing for a more inclusive process and robust stakeholder input.

These changes demonstrate careful legislative craftsmanship and a constructive response to stakeholder feedback.

Of course, as with any complex initiative, some refinements may still be warranted. OCC looks forward to continuing to work with the bill sponsors, committee members and stakeholders to make further adjustments that strengthen consumer protections while advancing Ohio’s clean energy and innovation goals.

In closing, OCC thanks Representatives Hoops and Ray, Chair Holmes and this Committee for their leadership and thoughtful attention to this issue. H.B. 303 represents a meaningful step toward a more diverse and consumer-focused energy future for Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.