

**HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON ENERGY POLICY AND
OVERSIGHT**

**Testimony of Jason M. Rafeld
Executive Director,
Utility Scale Solar Energy Coalition**

September 30, 2020

Chairman Hoops, Vice Chair Abrams, Ranking Member Leland,
Members of the House Select Committee on Energy Policy and Oversight.
Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony today. I am here at the
invitation of Chairman Hoops and hope my testimony regarding utility
scale solar in Ohio is helpful.

My name is Jason Rafeld, and I am the Executive Director of the
Utility Scale Solar Energy Coalition of Ohio (“USSEC”). USSEC is a
member-based trade organization representing utility-scale solar
developers, manufacturers, and industry leaders throughout the state of
Ohio. USSEC has been working to provide industry perspectives and data
that help inform a constructive dialogue with the Ohio Power Siting Board
and other decision makers around the state, such as yourselves. Utility
scale solar developers came together with the intent of collaborating, even
though they are competitors, to ensure the viability of this new industry in
Ohio by doing things right. In particular we are focusing on education and

engagement with the local communities where we intend to build. We believe a successful project starts with bringing the community into the conversation. Currently there are 18 members that include developers, owners, operators and manufacturers. These 18 members represent the majority of the utility-scale solar projects under development across the Buckeye state.

A few weeks ago, the Ohio Power Siting Board provided a snapshot of the current status of electric power generation in Ohio. This overview showed that solar generation was the most prominent fuel supply being developed in Ohio with more than 15 GW of solar projects in the interconnection queue.

There are a lot of variables that contribute to Ohio's emerging position as a solar powerhouse. Of the most significant, many large corporations choosing to locate in Ohio now have sustainability goals to reduce their carbon footprints and they are demanding carbon free energy sourced as close to their operations as they can get it. Companies like Facebook, Amazon, and Google are building data centers right here in Ohio to support their growing demand because our state provides convenient access to major markets and they are demanding clean energy. Some of our own cities, like Columbus and Cincinnati, are making carbon reduction commitments and demanding renewable energy. Eastern coastal

states are also attempting to implement aggressive goals in carbon free energy procurement through statewide renewable portfolio standards. However, those states lack the generation capability to meet their goals due to grid congestion, population density and topography. They cannot build enough carbon free generation to meet their goals.

Enter Ohio with its greenfield opportunities for construction and highly developed and accessible high voltage transmission network. Farmland is plentiful in Ohio, with more than 10 million tillable acres, and often presents an ideal location for building utility scale solar. Our state has long invested in a well-developed transmission system which is a strategic asset that enables generation to flow from the rural areas to the population centers. All of these attributes taken together, make Ohio an attractive state in which to build utility scale solar.

Utility scale solar also offers the potential for a massive economic infusion into our local communities and our state. In an effort to understand the economic impact this solar energy demand could have on Ohio, USSEC commissioned a study by the Ohio University that we recently released. The report shows compelling results detailing a significant increase in Ohio jobs and revenues to local communities. Ohio's utility scale solar industry has the potential to create more than \$18 billion in economic activity, supporting tens of thousands of jobs. The report

shows that if 7.5 GW of solar was built in Ohio, we could see enough clean energy generation to power the equivalent of 1.5 million homes, create 54,113 construction jobs and 618 operations and maintenance careers for the long haul. The economic impact would be \$9.6 billion during construction and \$6.4 billion during the ongoing operations and maintenance of the facilities.

The economic benefits represented by the utility scale solar industry in Ohio are no longer a thing of the future that Ohioans need to continue waiting for. I have submitted a copy of the Ohio University report and a fact sheet with this testimony so that you are able to review it further at your own convenience.

Earlier this year, in a historic moment for our state, the first utility scale solar project broke ground. Two others have broken ground since then and there are many other active projects currently pending before state regulators.

Utility scale solar will be a big part of energy development in Ohio and it will serve as an economic engine that helps to attract new industry to our state and provide zero- carbon energy for our citizens.

I was asked by Chairman Hoops to offer some thoughts on HB 6. Current law and the current discussions around repeal of HB 6 present a bit of a challenging dilemma for our membership. Some of our members benefitted from the solar language in current law while others took a loss with the reduction in RPS. As a result, USSEC has a bit of a divided opinion on the matter. Our members would support a return to the previous RPS because it's good for the industry. However, the projects that qualified to receive benefits from the Renewable Generation Fund have relied on that funding for their projects and do not want the financial support taken away, which is an understandable position. During the HB6 debate, many USSEC members testified sharing comments that they mobilized development activities in Ohio in response to the RPS. They shared the message that the RPS is working and it is a clear signal that Ohio is open for business. During these conversations last spring and summer, the USSEC members were open to tweaking the RPS to ensure that ratepayer dollars support in-state renewables and looking at mechanisms to further mitigate ratepayer costs. These views are still held by a majority of the USSEC members.

However, in an effort to respond more helpfully to Chairman Hoops, I offer the following. If the General Assembly's intent is to support carbon free generation, there should be a strong focus on the market signals Ohio is sending to the industry. As I mentioned earlier, Ohio is poised at the

potential beginning of an industry that up until months ago effectively did not exist and can be overwhelmingly beneficial to the state for decades. I say potential, because developers, owners, operators, investors and manufacturers are paying attention to our actions as a state. Those actions translate to signals which broadly communicate whether or not our state really wants utility scale solar. It's the difference in a "fingers-crossed," hopeful strategy and really trying to capitalize on a huge opportunity for our state.

The members of USSEC are eager to be part of the discussion to assist Ohio in making the most of this momentous opportunity. We've spent hours discussing, debating and attempting to come up with a silver bullet solution to offer you, but we're honestly not there yet. All the ideas need further study to ensure anything we offer achieves the desired results. Solutions like competitive procurement of Ohio-based, competitively sourced, carbon-free energy and tweaking the RPS to ensure in state procurement are some of the ideas we are discussing. As mentioned above we are focusing on sending the right market signals needed to capitalize on this opportunity to support in state carbon free generation. Importantly, USSEC supports all Ohio efforts to increase carbon free energy and believes all technologies should have the opportunity to be part of that solution.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Attachments:

Ohio University Economic Solar Report

USSEC Solar Report Factsheet