



Proponent Testimony for House Bill 450  
Allow development of community solar projects in Ohio  
Ohio House Public Utilities Committee  
November 10, 2021

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In conjunction with the Ohio Sustainable Business Council

Chairman Hoops, Vice Chair Ray, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the House Public Utilities Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of HB 450, which would enable the development of community solar projects in Ohio. My name is Cathy Cowan Becker, and I am executive director of Simply Living, a Columbus nonprofit that promotes sustainability, environmental justice, and our local economy. Simply Living works with the Ohio Sustainable Business Council, a statewide coalition of businesses and business networks committed to local, state, and federal policy that supports a vibrant, just, and sustainable economy.

Both Simply Living and the Ohio Sustainable Business Council offer our whole-hearted support for HB 450. All of our respective members are interested in powering their homes and businesses with renewable energy, especially solar. However, a shocking 80% of residents and businesses are not able to install solar panels on their roofs for a variety of reasons.

- They may rent rather than own the building.
- The roof may face the wrong direction, or be shaded by large trees they don't want to cut down, or be located in an HOA or historic district where solar panels are prohibited.
- Or they may not be able to afford the up-front cost of rooftop solar.

The answer for people in these situations is community solar. Community solar allows individuals to obtain solar energy by subscribing to a solar project that is not directly on their roof, and offsetting some or all of their electricity consumption with energy generated by the solar project through a subscription enabled by virtual net metering.

The details of HB 450 show that the sponsors have done their homework. Community solar is a form of distributed energy, generating small amounts of electricity close to the site of consumption and allowing people to use what they need. This keeps the energy at the site of local control and makes communities more resilient and self-reliant.

It is also great to see the special attention given to distressed areas, particularly in Appalachia, where jobs and clean energy are needed the most. Construction and maintenance of community solar projects will create jobs and boost our economy in Ohio where we need it the most.

Community solar also has strong public support. When I became director of Simply Living last March, the first thing I was asked about was community solar. A group of our members had a discussion group about community solar, looking at projects such as were being done in Minneapolis, wanting to know why these projects were not being done in Ohio.

I had to tell them Minnesota has enabling legislation that makes community solar possible, while Ohio does not. HB 450 would change that. We could put solar panels in a neighborhood to power nearby homes, churches, and businesses. A small solar project could go on the roof of a school or big box store, making their building and others nearby more resilient to storms that might knock out power to buildings on the larger grid. Apartment owners could install solar panels that individual tenants could subscribe to use. The possibilities are endless.

If the Ohio legislature passes HB 450, more than 330,000 Ohio families will have access to solar energy, even if they are not able to install it directly onto their own rooftops. This means lower energy bills for our families and more clean energy jobs for our state. Already 6,500 Ohioans are employed in the solar industry, with a 700% growth projected in the next five years.

More clean energy in Ohio also means better health for our residents. Using the EPA's AVERT and COBRA calculators, you can find that 3000 MW of clean energy in Ohio would save \$393 million in health care costs annually, resulting in 38 fewer deaths, 988 fewer breathing illnesses, and 1781 fewer workdays lost each year.

There's no downside for HB 450, and we urge you to support it. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and I would be happy to take any questions.