

Proponent Testimony by Ariel Miller on HB 179
House Public Utilities Committee
September 20, 2023

Chairman Stein, Vice-Chair Blasdel, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the House Public Utilities Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony on behalf of House Bill 197 (HB 197), the bill to authorize a community solar pilot program for Ohio.

I have worked and volunteered for the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio throughout my 35-year career as a journalist and consultant on solutions to poverty, including ten years leading a diocesan nonprofit that provided grants and organized conferences and workshops for Episcopal churches and their community partners across Southern Ohio.

Most of the Diocese's congregations contribute to community emergency assistance programs that struggle to prevent utility shut-offs. It is disheartening how quickly these funds run out every month. I follow these issues as a reporter for the Diocese and as the editor of the monthly newsletter of the Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group for Rotarians worldwide. In my volunteer Rotary role, I'm covering access to clean, affordable energy, as well as the restoration of soil fertility. This testimony reflects my personal views as an Ohio citizen – not necessarily that of the Diocese of Southern Ohio or of Rotary International - but I'm including my professional background because it gives me continuous opportunities to learn about the challenges for which your bill provides such promising solutions.

Rising average temperature and prolonged heatwaves are putting Ohio families at growing risk. Increased demand for air conditioning raises peak demand and electric costs, as well as the likelihood of blackouts. Increasing access to locally-generated solar power will protect Ohio's grid during times of highest need, and reduce costs for all ratepayers.

I congratulate the bill sponsors, Rep. Hoops and Rep. Ray, for developing this effective legal framework that creates a new way for our state to alleviate energy poverty, restore brownfields, and stimulate economic growth, particularly in Appalachian Ohio. The economic decline of Ohio's Appalachian counties and the ongoing harm from contamination of brownfields are chronic problems which your bill addresses holistically and creatively.

I encourage the committee to advance this bill to the floor of the House. This will bring welcome relief to financially-strapped Ohio renters and homeowners - particularly elderly people on fixed incomes - who can't afford rooftop solar. I am praying for resounding success with the pilot project and that you will then expand the scope of this new resource.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on behalf of HB 197.
Sincerely,

Ariel Miller
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