

Proponent Testimony by Lian Niu on House Bill 197
Managing Member, Eitri Foundry, LLC
House Public Utilities Committee
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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), a bill to support an all of the above energy strategy by allowing community solar as an opt-in option in the market. My name is Lian Niu, and I am Co-founder and Managing Member of Eitri Foundry, LLC.

We are an employee-owned company that works with communities to create the tools that enable choice in their own energy future. In Norse mythology, Eitri is the dwarf that crafted Thor's hammer which grants him the power to control lightning, electricity in its rawest form. Our name originates from that ethos, as we view our mission to be smithing tools that give control of electricity back to our partners. Yes, we're a company from Florida but we've spent the past 7 years and built our entire business around investing in Ohio. We build solar projects for small communities where the benefits are evident. We are offering low-cost, non-escalating energy rates by building projects that are sized appropriately, sited strategically, and structured to fit the needs of the local community. To date, we have worked with the municipal utilities of the state who are able to benefit from this type of investment, and in 7 years, our team has been able to invest over \$40M into Ohio, across 9 projects in 8 communities. This is just a small fraction of the footprint of Ohio that can benefit from these types of projects.

Community solar would open up the regulatory pathway for these small-scale 10 to 40 acre projects that would be distributed amongst the rest of the communities in Ohio that could benefit from fixed-rate, affordable energy choices. We know that this model works as we see it in action with the communities that Eitri has built with. Real, operational projects that are saving communities money right now. Real jobs that have been created and that have spurred additional growth. Further proof is that these communities are coming back to us to build additional phases. We are in construction on the 3rd phase project for the Village of Minster because they are seeing the real-world benefits. Being able to have the choice to deploy solar for their community has enabled this investment, and it has been chosen because it wins out on the economics. The green energy aspects are just icing on the cake, not the motivating factor.

Not only do consumers benefit from this choice, but businesses and industry are making investment and growth decisions in large part based on energy needs. Energy costs can be a major component of a business's operations. Being able to secure long-term, fixed-rate, and affordable energy can be the key to an investment decision. Hedging the volatile global energy markets which are impacted by numerous events outside of our control is a key factor. Community solar enables another option to these businesses that they can literally take to the bank. This helps them make the business case to locate their operations in Ohio, investing in building out new facilities and employing a local workforce. Additionally, we see the continued trend of corporate sustainability goals being a factor in these decisions, reaching further back into the supply chain. Community solar not only offers this incredible ability to benefit their



business on the economic side, but also provides a solution to the environmental goals, served by local resources.

Community solar would lead to a massive investment in Ohio and that means jobs. Good paying, local jobs. Not just construction laborers and electricians, but surveyors, engineers, linesmen, and manufacturing for the increasingly local supply chain of equipment. Racking manufacturers such as Terrasmart & APA Racking are building products in Ohio, supporting steelworkers & fabrication lines. Module manufacturers are building products in Ohio and investing in new locations, as evidenced by the \$600M investment that Longi recently announced for the construction of a solar panel manufacturing facility in Pataskala, which will create 850 good-paying jobs.

Not only are there jobs, but there is job training that allows apprentices and new entrants to the workforce to learn the skills they need to build a career. We have been working with groups like Vaughn, based out of Carey, Ohio, on projects right here in the state for the past 7 years, where Ohio residents have been able to learn and practice their electrical skills. This is not just solar – these skills are applicable in commercial, industrial, residential, and utility settings, building the skillset for a family-supporting wage in the trades career pathway. Someone who started learning about solar can easily transition to one of the many other branches of electrical work simply because the foundation of knowledge is already there.

As part of my mission to support energy education in Ohio, I also have the honor of being able to serve as a Board Member of the Ohio Energy Project. The Ohio Energy Project is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that serves students, teachers and communities by connecting education with industry to spark energy curiosity in young minds. Speaking about the importance of sustainability in classrooms and explaining semiconductor physics to students during tours of our power plants gives me a feeling of fulfillment from knowing that I am doing my part to enlighten the minds of those who will be responsible for building our future. This is personally important to me as an engineer with many mentors that gave tirelessly to educate me, giving me the tools to build my own business but also constantly reminding me that I can enable an even more enlightened future by sharing and giving back the knowledge and experiences that have been gifted to me.

We see community solar programs working in other states. States on both sides of the political spectrum have seen success with community solar programs. Minnesota has seen over \$1B of community solar deployed. New York has 100's of megawatts being installed, with a lot of focus on projects that are benefitting farming communities upstate. Nebraska has seen successful community solar programs deployed across numerous public power districts. North Carolina has seen rural electric co-ops take the lead in building out community solar programs as they see enabling this choice bringing an advantageous choice. This is not a political issue, this is a practical solution that benefits consumers.

We can learn from these programs and other facets of the industry to create guidelines for Ohio that balance all stakeholder concerns. The incentivization of brownfield & distressed sites is smart policy, bringing new life and revitalization to these properties where solar is the highest and best use. On greenfield sites, limiting project sizes to that which fits on the local distribution grid, typically 5 to



10MW or less, resulting in projects on 10 to 40 acres which fit in with the community without taking over too much space. Promoting good neighbor practices such as planting native pollinator vegetation mixes to promote soil health and local bird & bug populations. Working with neighbors to ensure tile pipe systems are maintained, storm water management practices are implemented, and generally implementing practices where private property rights are upheld whilst not causing any impact to your neighbors private property rights.

We believe these systems can bring immense benefits to the state of Ohio, its residents and businesses, and the nation as a whole by supporting an all of the above energy strategy, enabling consumer choice in the free market, bringing forth significant cost savings, creating family-sustaining jobs, and spurring economic development & investment into the manufacturing base. We welcome the thoughtful crafting of community solar policy in Ohio which will enable these benefits.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on behalf of HB 197. I am happy to answer your questions.

Respectfully,

Lian Niu
Managing Member
Eitri Foundry, LLC

