

Proponent Testimony by Tom Forman on House Bill 197  
Member, MTM Project Development Company LLC  
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), a bill to incentives community solar in specified communities. My name is Tom Forman, and I am a member of MTM Project Development Company, LLC.

I am an active member of MTM Project Development Company, an Ohio LLC. We support HB 197 and believe in its ambitious goals to incentivize solar installations to create a free market solution to Ohio's increasing energy generation needs while providing economic development opportunities uniquely suited to the communities they will be developed in. Specifically, we envision this legislation could be a major catalyst to help us move forward the creation of community solar on several parcels of land in Southeastern Ohio. Our plan for Ohio Valley Solar Project is to provide electricity, jobs, and tax revenue to this low-income community with high unemployment caused by the progressive shutdown of coal extraction.

Last year we applied to PJM for 150MW solar installation on part of the property but recognize their process can be very long and arduous. To accelerate offering solar energy to the area, we have been exploring multiple community solar installations. The property overlays one of the largest former longwall coal fields in Ohio, which is now permanently closed, and has ample room and attractive sites for these type of smaller community solar installations without jeopardizing the large one. We believe that with the proper incentives, we can bring small-scale solar installations to our economically challenged community that will directly benefit our local citizens who have suffered high unemployment once the coal mines were shuttered. Because the mines had their own energy needs when they were operational, the property benefits in having numerous power lines on or adjacent to it, as well as the pads of former substations, making it uniquely attractive for the addition of solar power.

A concern we have with the language of HB 197 is our property is served by a rural not-for-profit electric cooperative, South Central Power, which feeds into AEP, but it is not clear that similar co-ops are included in the significant incentives offered by HB 197. We believe it would not be logical to exclude electric co-ops because most of the communities the legislation is supposed to help are served by these electrical co-op. It is our hope that they are specifically included in the bill to avoid the potential that the lack of specificity is misinterpreted to exclude them from participating, which has occurred to similar programs in other states.

On a personal and professional note, I formerly was the Executive Vice President and on the board of one of Ohio's largest companies and have had the opportunity to watch other states move forward much more aggressively than our own. And talent and opportunities drained away to other parts of the country. Which have made the more recent announcements by Intel

and Google, among others, exciting and hopefully just the beginning of a resurgence in bringing to Ohio technology and skilled employment. These types of companies and employees will have a deep interest in renewable energy and will be tuned into the State's commitment to accelerating its availability and use. The report on energy issued by PUCO identified Ohio's growing need for power and highlighted its very low utilization of solar; less than 1%. That needs to be corrected if we are to attract more tech companies and employees. Permitting and even encouraging community utilities to become involved in solar will not only benefit their members but provide both the perception and demonstrable proof that the State is committed to a high tech, renewable future. In the communities to be served by Ohio Valley Solar Project, it creates the potential for attracting new manufacturing and technology companies to locate there, providing employment opportunities as well as an expanded tax base.

It is our request that the language of the bill be improved by specifically adding that rural electric cooperatives are eligible to participate in the incentives either directly using its own infrastructure or indirectly using investor-owned utility infrastructure. And even be encouraged to do so. We look forward to working with you to help assure the fundamental purpose of HB 197 - to incentive small-scale solar installations in economically challenged communities that would benefit local citizens - will be attained.