2024 Legislative Session

Energy & Technology Committee

Public Hearing February 27, 2024

**Key Links**:

* Hearing agenda
* Submit written testimony
* Register to testify in person or via Zoom
* Watch hearing live

**Covered bills:**

* HB-5231: An Act Concerning Revisions to the State’s Nonresidential Renewable Energy Program and Shared Clean Energy Facility Program
* HB-5232: An Act Concerning Solar Projects Throughout the State
* HB-5052: An Act Concerning Solar Energy in Schools

**General Speaking Points:**

* Solar offers Connecticut the opportunity to:
	+ Create local jobs, wealth and tax revenues
	+ Give us lower and stable energy costs
	+ Reduce our reliance on other state and nations
	+ Take advantage of generous federal funding through the Inflation Reduction Act
	+ Reduce the need for the buildout of the electric grid
	+ Flatten our peak energy demand (e.g., by producing energy on hot summer days, when air conditioners are running)
	+ Achieve our clean energy targets
* Contrary to current myths, solar lowers and stabilizes energy costs.
	+ Today, we get most of our electricity from fossil fuels and nuclear. We know these costs will continue to increase.
	+ By transitioning to solar, we get onto a downward-sloping energy cost curve.
	+ Making this transition requires us to invest in solar today, and thanks to federal funds, we can do this without increasing the cost to ratepayers.
* Connecticut has the most prolific and innovated public utility regulator in the country. In a few years, PURA has designed multiple programs and initiatives for solar, storage, EV chargers and the grid. Let’s support PURA in continuing to lead Connecticut to a clean energy world. Specifically, the legislature should grant PURA the authority and guidance to expand solar programs while balancing ratepayer costs.

**Points Specific to Reviewed Bills:**

* All three of these bills pertain to *commercial* solar. Note that residential solar experienced strong growth in 2023. Connecticut’s residential solar program does not have caps, but rather has a target of 60 megawatts (MW) per year. In 2023, when the final numbers are in, we will probably have deployed four times this amount.
*Comment: The recent success of CT’s residential solar program demonstrates the strong public demand for solar and the potential of a program not limited by artificial caps.*
* Connecticut’s *nonresidential* solar program is capped at 110 MW per year[[1]](#footnote-1). HB-5231 proposes removing these caps for as long as federal funding for solar is available through the Inflation Reduction Act.
*Comment: We strongly support removing these commercial caps to take advantage of federal funding currently available. These federal funds lower the cost of solar projects and allow for rapid growth without increasing the cost to Connecticut’s ratepayers. Currently, program caps hold back solar deployments and leave federal funds on the table.*
* In 2020, Connecticut established a Shared Clean Energy Facility (SCEF) program to broaden participation in clean energy, including solar. SCEF was capped at 25 MW per year for three years and at 50 MW for the second three years. The program will expire next year. HB-5231 requires the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) to study a 2-year extension of this program and a successor program.
*Comment: We support these recommendations and recommend the legislature grant PURA the authority to extend the current SCEF program and increase its caps without waiting for the results of a study. As noted above, PURA has an extremely capable and innovative team, and is capable of designing, monitoring and adapting clean energy programs to balance clean energy goals and ratepayer impacts.*
* Today, Connecticut has set broad targets to decarbonize our electric grid by 2040, but has not set specific targets for solar. HB-5232 sets a target if 500 MW of solar per year, with priority going to low-income residents and distressed communities, and a goal of installing solar on 250,000 residences by 2035.
*Comment: We strongly support these targets and we believe they are both necessary and achievable. PACE estimates that Connecticut will need approximately 20,000 MW of solar by 2050, but we have only 1,300 MW to date. Getting to 500 MW per year quickly is essential to reaching our targets. Moreover, we have installed solar on roughly 70,000 residences in the state. The recent success of the residential solar program, it is realistic to reach 250,000 homes by 2035.*
* Solar canopies offer Connecticut a way to deploy significant amounts of solar without taking up prime farmland and forests. In addition, they offer additional benefits such as protection from weather, reducing urban heat island effect, and can be paired with storage and electric vehicle chargers. To date, few canopies have been built. HB-5232 proposes several measures that will streamline and expedite the approval of these projects, and explore additional ways to promote canopies.
*Comment: We strongly support these provisions. PACE estimates that Connecticut could build over 8,400 canopies on parking lots, representing over 7,000 MW and producing roughly 38% of our current electricity usage.[[2]](#footnote-2)*
* Currently, commercial solar projects are subject to different local property tax treatment, depending on where the project is located. As a result, solar developers face uncertainty and delays. HB-5232 establishes a uniform approach to local taxation of commercial solar.
*Comment: We support these changes, as they will streamline the financing and approval of solar projects.*
* In 2020, the legislature allowed commercial customers to build rooftop solar arrays larger than their local usage. At first, only a “buy-all” tariff was allowed on such oversized arrays. HB-5231 proposes allowing “netting” tariffs on these arrays up to 2½ times the local load.
*Comment: We support this change, as it gives commercial customers greater options in designing and financing oversized rooftop solar projects.*
* Today, roughly 300 schools in Connecticut have solar, representing under one-third of all schools in the state.[[3]](#footnote-3) Schools are ideal candidates for solar, as they typically have large, flat, unshaded roofs, are able to enter long-term contracts and can turn solar into an educational opportunity. Energy savings from solar directly benefit local communities. HB-5052, proposed by Governor Lamont, proposes a separate tariff for solar on schools and provides school districts grants to explore solar through the CT Green Bank.

*Comment: We strongly support these measures, but suggest that, in addition to the CT Green Bank, commercial solar installers be permitted to assess solar feasibility under school district grants.*

**For Additional Information:**

* More Solar Sooner
* Community Solar
* Testimony Toolkit from the CT Roundtable on Climate and Jobs

**Contacts**

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1. 25 MW for small zero emission (<200 KW), 30 MW for medium zero emission (200-1000 kW), 45 MW for large zero emission (1000-5000 kW) and 10 MW for low emission (<5000 kW) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Shining Bright: How a Connecticut Group is Pinpointing Potential Solar Parking Lot Canopies [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Solar on Connecticut Schools, PACE, 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)