



March 28, 2016

The Honorable Robert A. DeLeo, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Stanley C. Rosenberg, Senate President
The Honorable Brian Dempsey, House Chair
The Honorable Benjamin Downing, Senate Chair
The Honorable Thomas Golden, House Vice Chair
The Honorable Marc Pacheco, Senate Vice-Chair
The Honorable Bradley Jones, Ranking House Member
The Honorable Bruce Tarr, Ranking Senate Member

Conference Committee on solar net metering legislation (S. 2058 and H. 3854)
State House
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Conference Committee Members:

As advocates for low income communities, we're writing to express concern about the legislative proposals to decrease the value of net metering credits for affordable housing and low income solar projects while retaining the "retail" net metering rate for private residential and small solar projects. Such a move will not only limit access to solar for low income people, but needlessly exacerbate the divide between those who can afford to go solar and those who cannot. **It would have the unintended consequence of worsening income inequality in public policy. We respectfully request that retail net metering is maintained for solar projects that benefit affordable housing, low income residents and the organizations that serve them.**

The importance of ensuring equitable access to solar across Massachusetts cannot be overstated. Existing retail net metering and virtual net metering policies make it possible for everyone to directly benefit from solar, regardless of their income level or where they live. Massachusetts is on track to have more solar serving affordable housing and low income communities than any other state in the nation.

In low income communities, solar is an important way to address energy affordability challenges. In a time of increasing and highly volatile electricity prices, driven almost entirely by an overreliance on natural gas, solar can be used shield Massachusetts' most vulnerable populations and the organizations that serve them from escalating energy costs. This is done most effectively when the value of the net metering credit equals the full retail cost of electricity.

Decreasing the value of net metering credits for low income solar projects, while maintaining retail net metering for private residential solar projects, means that those who earn less, and who live in urban environments, will benefit less from solar. Most lower income households rent rather than own their homes. Most urban properties are constrained in regards to solar access. The best, if not the only, way for them to access solar is through an off site solar project via virtual net metering. Projects on apartment complexes are almost always larger than 25 kilowatts in size and thus, under current proposals, would receive lower compensation than a project located on a single family home. Pricing below full retail makes it much harder, if not impossible, to offer low income customers cost savings from solar, and much harder to obtain financing to build low income solar projects.

In our view, it's critical to ensure that everyone benefits from the Commonwealth's transition to a renewable energy future and that low income people can directly receive the cost savings associated with doing that. Otherwise, we run the risk of leaving people behind and creating a two-tiered energy system whereby those with fewer financial resources or who don't own their roof are unable to access the benefits of an increasingly renewable, smart and distributed energy system. This is why it's so important that low income solar projects continue to receive full retail net metering. Please help ensure that solar legislative proposals allow for that.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,

Boston Community Capital

Citizens Housing and Planning Association

Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation

Coop Power

Dismas House

Enterprise Community Partners

Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Boston

Neighbor to Neighbor-Worcester Chapter

Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations

Worcester Green Low Income Housing Coalition

cc:

Members of the Massachusetts Senate
Members of the Massachusetts House of Representatives