

JEFF GOLDEN
STATE SENATOR
DISTRICT 3



OREGON STATE SENATE

February 13, 2020

To: Members of the House Committee on Business and Labor
From: Senator Jeff Golden, District 3
Re: SB 1563A

Chair Barker, Vice-Chairs Barreto and Bynum, Members of the Committee—

Thank you for your consideration of SB 1563A, which passed the Senate on a 28-0 vote on February 11. We found this an easy decision because the bill reflects consensus resolution of a long, sometimes challenging conversation among the three stakeholders in Oregon's solar installation industry: the contractors who install solar equipment (primarily on rooftops), the IBEW, and the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA).

Twenty years ago, Oregon statute created the job classification of Licensed Renewable Energy Technician (LRET) to enumerate and circumscribe the scope of electrical work that could be done by those installing renewable energy devices, primarily rooftop solar panels. The maximum size of an allowed project was set at 25 kilowatts—ample for residential and modest commercial projects at the time—and an endpoint in the circuitry beyond which the LRET could not work was established. The important principle was to assure that LRETs would not do any of the work in the main service panel of a building or beyond it, into the building. That work was reserved for fully licensed journeyman electricians, and still will be if SB1563 becomes law.

The applicable statute has not changed in twenty years, but just about everything in the solar industry has. Residential and commercial systems now frequently exceed 25kw in size, and state-of-the-art solar systems are now configured in ways that don't match the technical language of the existing statute. SB 1563 updates statute in two ways: the maximum size of systems within the LRET scope of work increases from 25 to 50kw, and the specification of the endpoint to which the LRET can do electrical work is revised to fit the design of modern solar components. It remains the case that the LRET's permitted work stops before entry into the electrical service box, the unit where circuit breakers are installed.

The three stakeholders mentioned above worked extensively to resolve the technical wording of these updates, and SB 1563 embodies their agreement. This bill effectively eases an increasing bottleneck in the residential and commercial solar sector and will significantly shorten the installation wait time. Some customers have had to wait for a journeyman electrician (which, in the current construction environment, can last weeks or months) to install a few feet of wiring, which is easily within the competency and knowledge of an LRET. I appreciate the work of these stakeholders to arrive at a sensible and safe solution that benefits this vital and growing industry, as well as its employees and customers. I ask for your support of SB 1563.

With thanks,

Jeff Golden
Senate District 3