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Community Renewable Energy Association: *an intergovernmental entity representing local governments and developers of renewable energy facilities in Oregon since 2007.*

Senate Committee on Energy and Environment

February 7, 2023

Testimony of Mike McArthur, Executive Director

Chair Sollman and members of the committee:

Consistent with its mission, CREA supports SB 54. SB 54 would extend property tax exemption to commercial community solar projects first granted exemption for property tax year beginning on or after July 1, 2023.

Oregon's Community Solar Program, created in 2016 by SB 1547, was created to expand solar access to retail electric customers who are unable to net meter for such reasons as inadequate roofs, lease restrictions, ineligibility for the federal Investment Tax Credit, and high up-front costs. Oregon is one of many states that have adopted similar programs. However, Oregon's Community Solar Program is falling far short of expected participation. Due in part to unprecedented inflation and interest rates, Oregon Community Solar Projects are not economic to build or operate.

During the 2022 session the legislature passed SB 1519, which granted exemption for property tax to Community Solar systems owned or leased by residential customers, but not systems owned or leased by non-residential customers. The well-intended bill did not go far enough: only three projects totaling 0.53 MW have been completed since SB

1519 took effect; during the same time more than 20 MW have been delayed or canceled. SB 54 would refine SB 1519 by adding non-residential Community Solar systems to the ORS 307.175 list of tax-exempted energy properties. Non-residential Community Solar participants (who bring stability and credit worthiness to a Community Solar Project) are necessary for program success and deserving of property tax exemption as equal to net metering. These entities include Indian tribes, small businesses, and government entities--some encouraged or mandated to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. If Oregon wants Community Solar to succeed, these customers need to have financially viable Community Solar projects in which to subscribe. In many cases, the exemption is the difference between a viable and a non-viable project, and only way the program could meet its original intent.

CREA is supportive of the development of Community Solar Projects; however, without prompt legislative attention, most of the Community Solar Projects will not go forward. The actual foregone county revenues from these projects are likely very small. Having provided the opportunity for all customers to enjoy the benefits of community solar, and having enticed customers and developers to participate, it is very important that Oregon take steps necessary for the Community Solar program to actually succeed. Please support SB 54 and pass it out of committee. Thank you for your consideration.