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Testimony in support of SB92

Chair Sollman and members of the Senate Committee of Energy and Environment:

I write as cofacilitator of Southern Oregon Climate Action Now, an organization of some 2,000 Southern Oregonians who are concerned about the climate crisis and encourage state action to address it. As rural and coastal Southern Oregonians, we live on the frontlines of the warming, reducing snowpack, heatwaves, drought, rising sea level, and the increasing wildfire risk that these trends conspire to impose on us. Because of this, we pay close attention to what is happening in the state legislature that relates to climate.

In a recent discussion of the main solutions to the climate crisis, Bruce-Lockhart et al. (2024) argued that wind and solar are two of the most scalable options. However, as Cochran (2024) points out “Renters face significant barriers to accessing solar energy, including homeownership bias, limited incentives for landlords, and gaps in current policies that exclude tenants from solar benefits.”

Energy Burden (EB) represents the proportion of gross income that is spent on energy (Energy 2018). After studying the energy burden effects of installing rooftop solar for those with different income levels, Forrester et al. (2024) concluded that for a majority of adopters, and allowing for incentives, the reduction in energy burden was from 3.3% to 2.6% while for low and moderate income adopters, the reduction was from 7.7% to 6.2%. As Shuff (2022) reports, if 6% of income is devoted to energy, the household is energy burdened, but if this figure reaches 10%, extreme energy burden is assigned. According to ACEE (2024) “a quarter of all U.S. households and two-thirds of low-income ones have high energy burdens, meaning they spend more than 6% of their income on utility bills, and two of every five low-income households have severe burdens, spending more than 10% of their income on energy costs.” It is evident that low-income Americans have a higher energy burden, a burden that can be lowered with access to solar panels.

Besides a lack of information and consumer awareness, a main barrier for low- and moderate-income households to install solar is the upfront cost and the unavailability of financing options Nabaloga D (2024). However, as Thoubboron and McDrevitt (2023) argue, a solution to this

problem is Community Solar because “You get to enjoy the benefits of solar energy without installing anything on your property and paying little to no upfront costs. It works like this: a large-scale solar array sends renewable energy to the local utility grid ...[and] you support a portion of the solar array and receive credits on your electricity bills.”

In 2016, the Oregon Legislature approved SB1547 (Olis 2016) which, among other positive steps, enabled community solar projects. The rules were promulgated later (OPUC 2018). At its passage, Community Solar was awarded a limited generation capacity, and this has been almost completely allocated. Community solar is an extremely successful method for allowing Oregonians who cannot install solar panels – for whatever reason – to take advantage of solar generation to offset their energy bills. The program also reduces greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the generation of electricity by fossil fuel-powered generation facilities. Two decades ago, in-state coal generation accounted for 10% of the electricity generated, but Oregon’s last coal-fired power plant closed in 2020 (EIA 2024). In 2021, while Hydro accounted for 38% of the electricity generated, out-of-state coal-fired power plants still accounted for 21.83%. (Oregon undated), wind accounted for 9.33% and solar accounted for less than 3% compared to the national 4.7%. As Hill-Hart (2024) pointed out: “In 2021, Oregon passed the 100% clean electricity law (HB 2021). This law requires Portland General Electric (PGE) and Pacific Power to reduce their carbon emissions by 80% by 2030 and 100% by 2040.” This author then points out: “PGE’s emissions have fallen by 27% from the baseline and Pacific Power has fallen by 13%. This means that in the 8 years between 2022 and 2030, Pacific Power needs to reduce its carbon emissions by two-thirds. PGE must reduce its carbon emissions by half.” One way these utilities can reduce their emissions is by supporting residential solar installation with net metering and supporting community solar projects for renters or homeowners unable to install solar.

Clearly, in Oregon, there is much room for improving the percentage of electricity generated from solar panels. Incentives for installing rooftop solar and increasing access to community solar are clearly two ways to encourage this increase. One advantage that community solar has over personal installation is the economy of scale (Sendy 2025). He points out that “the larger the solar installation, the lower the average cost per watt.” Thus, “Community solar projects, with their much larger size, can thus achieve a much lower setup cost than you would see in a smaller, single-home installation.” In a state that seeks to promote renewable energy and restrain fossil fuel energy use, it only makes good sense to promote community solar projects rather than constrain them.

The problem Oregon faces is that the limited capacity awarded to community solar projects has almost been used. Thus, SB92 OLIS (2025) was generated. The essential benefits of this bill are that it

- Expands Community Solar Projects by a small percentage each year,

- Decreases delays in community solar project completion by enforcing interconnection deadlines,
- Allows larger projects to utilize economies of scale and align with Community-based Renewable Energy requirements,
- Increase the flexibility allowed for project locations and customer subscriptions,
- Reduces administrative costs
- Incentivizes battery storage for community resilience.

For these reasons, Southern Oregon Climate Action Now endorsed SB92 and urges its passage with a recommendation to the full chamber of 'Do Pass'.

Respectfully Submitted



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