

Energy and Technology Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5052

Title: AN ACT SUPPORTING SOLAR ENERGY IN SCHOOLS.

Vote Date: 3/21/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/27/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

[Representative David Michel, 146th District](#)
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[Representative Anne M. Hughes, 135th District](#)
[Representative Eleni Kavros DeGraw, 17th District](#)
[Representative Christine Palm, 36th District](#)
[Representative Frank Smith, 118th District](#)
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[Representative Jennifer Leeper, 132nd District](#)
[Senator Julie Kushner, 24th District](#)
[Representative Jillian Gilchrest, 18th District](#)
[Representative Geraldo C. Reyes, 75th District](#)
[Representative Amy Morrin Bello, 28th District](#)

REASONS FOR BILL:

As the state works to achieve its climate goals, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving the air quality, solar is a promising avenue to develop the state. Neighboring states have developed their solar industries tremendously of recent years, and Connecticut looks to do the same by transitioning to solar not only in residential buildings, but also in public buildings such as schools. Current legislation has multiple obstacles for installing solar panels in public buildings, and this bill would provide an avenue for schools to transition to clean energy when considering renovation. This bill would also provide the opportunity for schools to minimize electricity interruptions in schools, as power outages can be disruptive for teachers, students, and parents.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont: This bill is in line with the Governor's current agenda to improve climate resiliency, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and increase renewable energy deployment. As the Governor's administration works to invest in infrastructure projects across the state of Connecticut, they have noticed that the current law has obstacles to making investments in local public schools. The state's non-residential solar program has annual caps on the amount of solar it can install every year, which makes it difficult to transition public schools to full solar. Installing solar can be much simpler when the schools are prepared to take on the construction, and this bill will provide the avenue to do so. There will be many benefits to installing solar in school, such as improving efficiency with students, families, and teachers regarding disruptions in schools, saving in electricity costs, improving the local air quality, and decreasing carbon emissions.

Katie Dykes, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP): DEEP supports this bill, as it would help the state progress toward its goal of a zero-carbon electric sector by 2040. The deployment of distributed photovoltaic technology and energy storage technology has many different benefits, including offsetting energy costs for schools, increasing resilience, and contributing to decarbonizing the electric sector.

Marissa P. Gillett, Chairman, Connecticut Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA): PURA provides informational testimony regarding this bill and its impact. PURA supports the implementation of Section 2, where the approach to both establish a pathway to access solar systems and a program to allow for solar deployment if it is fit for a school is beneficial to unlocking financial benefits of solar in public schools. PURA does not necessarily think that Section 2(h)(1), which allows for an equal amount of solar and storage, must be required, since solar photovoltaic systems are typically sized to maximize production. Section (h)(8) may not also be necessary as well, as it may be duplicative of the existing allowance of virtual net metering. PURA also would search for clarification on the 25 MW deployment cap in Section 2(h)(1).

Claire E. Coleman, Connecticut Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC): The OCC overall supports cost-effective solar deployment, since it saves money for ratepayers and offers important climate benefits that align with the state's public health and climate goals. The OCC is in favor of prioritizing solar on larger surface areas to maximize cost-effectiveness of the solar array, but they also recognize the important cost-saving opportunities that this bill provides for schools. The OCC also supports the proposed program cap of 25MWs included in Section 2.

Michelle Gilman, Commissioner, Department of Administrative Services (DAS): The DAS supports this bill and encourages schools to consider solar when undertaking construction projects. DAS recently completed revisions to the Power Purchase Agreement, which allows Executive Branch agencies to participate in no-cost solar projects in collaboration with the Connecticut Green Bank, which would encourage the use of clean energy.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Rachel Briggs, Staff Attorney, Conservation Law Foundation (CLF): CLF is in general support of this bill, as Connecticut schools are large sources of greenhouse gas emissions. However, energy costs for public schools rank second only to faculty salaries. CLF is in support of the creation of a docket through PURA that develops programs for rooftop solar and energy storage systems for public schools, grant programs funded through the Connecticut Green Bank, and is support of funding solar feasibility and energy efficiency studies prior to installation.

Lori Brown, Executive Director, Connecticut League of Conservation Voters: The CT League of Conservation Voters is eager for this bill, as the public can greatly benefit from solar energy. Neighboring states, such as Massachusetts, Vermont, and Rhode Island, have doubled their solar per capita in recent years, and Connecticut should follow suit. The legislature should be prioritizing making the transition to solar more affordable for businesses and families and achieving its carbon emission reduction goals.

Susan Eastwood, Chair of Ashford Clean Energy Task Force and Chapter Chair of Sierra Club Connecticut: Currently, Connecticut is not on target to meet its goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The adoption of solar in Connecticut could be one of many solutions. Since many schools in Ashford have flat roofs, they are perfect to install solar panels. Many towns would be motivated to install solar panels like the town of Ashford if this bill were to be enacted.

Brianna Jackson, Trumbull Sustainable Youth: Solar energy is crucial for the future for schools and Connecticut's local economies.

Robert LaFrance, Director of Policy, Audubon Society: The Audubon Society agrees with the Governor's fact sheet on the bill, but does not see the need to limit the program to identify a reasonable cap. They believe that other renewables such as geothermal energy should also be considered.

The following provided testimony in support of HB-5052:

Andy A., Carl Demilia, Katherine Allison, Thomas Denzler, Ledyard High School, Benjamin Baker, Andy Bauer, Elena Billing, Lynne Bonnett, Lori Brown, Ellen Castaldini, Paul Cocuzzo, Randy Collins, Bradford Czepiel, Aziz Dehkan, Laura Del Savio, Katie Digiantonio, Susan Eastwood, Dr. Kirsten Ek, Robert Evans, Julianne Farnham, Bill Finch, Bruce Freeman, Nathan Frohling, Vincent Giordano, Kimberly Glassman, Donna Grossman, Peter Hanson, Henry Haskell, Janet Heller, Will Herchel, Alice Morgan, Mari Jackson, Robert Janis, Mark Johnson, Adelheid Koepfer, Roger Kuhns, Richard Landau, Ann Levison, Valessa Suter-Line, Dr. Henry Lowendorf, Paul Maidment, MaryEllen Mateleska, Stanley McMillen, Thomas Melone, Peter Meny, Peter Millman, Frances Moore, Ronald Nelson, Susan Olson, Pamela Paultre, Bernard Pelletier, Jonathan Perloe, Jocelyn Phung, Francis Pullaro, Kathleen Quinn, Scott Redfern, David & Marge Schneider, Mark Scully, Greg Shearer, William Simmons, Michele Sorensen, Mary Stevens, Kimberly Stoner, Joyce Sutcliffe, Tom Swan, Michael Trahan, Susan Van Kleef, Svetlana Wasserman, Eric Weiner, Evan Williams, Alison Zyla, John Harrity, Shauna Lake, Justin Kaput, Stanley Heller, Raphael Elkind, Tanya Bourgoin, Steve Winter, Rebecca Weiner, Jean Webber, Eric Virkler, Natalie Treat, Sandra Tosi, Barbara Talbot, Lindsay Suter, Brian Stewart, Steve Stephanou, Mary Sherwin, Amy Searle, Chris Sweitzer, Charles Rothenberger, John Rinaldi, Tito Quarah, Jack Potter, Chris Phelps,

Annie Perkins, Laurie Pavlos, Amy Patterson, Jon Olson, Pete Myers, Mark Mitchell, Susan Miller, Nick Menapace, Thomas Mead, Ian McDonald, Claire Matthews, Rod Martin, Jeffrey Macel, Fred Louis, Stephen Lewis, Leon Levine, Oliwia Krupinska, Kelly Kennedy, Ahna Johnson, Stephanie Jackson, Susan Hope, Arthur Helmens, Gwen Gunn, Royal Graves, Rebecca Friedkin, Hedley Freake, Kenny Foscue, Christina Felley, Ben Demilia, Eugene DeJoannis, Priscilla Dannies, Davida Crabtree, Ben Candea, CT Coalition for Climate Action, Rachel Briggs, Joy Bonitz, Elaine Betoncourt, Kevin Banach Robert Andrews, John Brady, Robert Dickinson, Sarah Donovan, Bayard Faithfull, Fran Rabinowitz, Fiona Austin.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Robert Keen, Retired Power Engineer

Mr. Keen opposes HB-5052 because the proposal to use; wind, solar and energy storage is an extremely expensive option. According to ISO-NE models, the 20-year commitment to rely on solar is not only negatively impacts our electric grid but it affects the non-solar, low-income, and distressed communities. Solar is increasing, not decreasing in cost: 54 c/kWh in 2023 for average costs of \$4600 per kW- DC for the last 6 months on the Eversource website. California has been reducing payment for solar at 75% from 30cents/KwH to 8cents, and as a result non-solar ratepayers were negatively affected by about \$3.6billion per year. Storage makes it somewhat reliable until Winter Peak comes then the rate jumps to 70cents/KwH which is subsidized to non-solar neighbors. The current level of supports isn't sustainable and concludes in the increased cost of providing a reliable system being tolerated by a decreasing number of non-solar customers especially the lower income and those in disadvantaged communities.

Daniel Thomas Jr, Taxpayer United

Mr. Thomas opposes HB-5052, believes we should investigate other resources that does not involve the sun. Solar power is limited in certain areas, we should look for other options for clean energy.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

PURA requests clarification on the 25 MW deployment cap in Section 2(h)(1), as they interpret it to be incremental to any caps in the Conn. Gen. Statutes Section 16-244z.

The Foundation for Fair Contracting of Connecticut encourages that language mandating that any contractors or subcontractors hired to perform solar projects be enrolled in a state-approved apprenticeship program.

The Audubon Society agrees with the Governor's fact sheet on the bill, but does not see the need to limit the program to identify a reasonable cap. They believe that other renewables such as geothermal energy should also be considered.

Reported by: Abigail Lockwood and Josh Reyes Date: April 5th, 2024