

General Law Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5151

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING SOLAR LICENSING EXEMPTIONS.

Vote Date: 3/7/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/22/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

General Law Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

Current law requires that certain work on solar installations must be performed by a licensed electrician (such as connecting the solar panels to the electrical panel). The bill attempts to clarify what work does not need to be performed by a non-licensed electrician, such as uncrating and hoisting the panels. Under the proposed language, however, “placement and anchoring” of the panels would need to be performed by a licensed electrician. Neither “placement” nor “anchoring” is defined in the statute.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None expressed

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Daniel McInerney, Business Manager, IBEW Local Union 488

Mr. McInerney supports this bi-partisan bill that will close a 2007 loophole that was inserted into legislation with no discussion. The exemption of this bill needs to be clarified. This clarification would ensure installations of solar panels are done safely and would also create good paying jobs. Under this bill licensed electricians and their apprentices would be required for any work that includes electricity: the wiring, grounding, bonding, and fastening of the solar panels. The bill then clarifies what work is not electrical and can be done by other skilled trades. This bill aligns the installation of solar energy with current State requirements. With all that this bill does it also allows for a career path for individuals, which also means higher paying jobs.

Bill Finch, Connecticut Labor Management Cooperation Committee

Mr. Finch supports this bill. One line of the legislation passed in 2007 Energy Bill eliminated the requirement that workers hold an electrical license to perform critical portions of installing solar panels. Solar panels generate electricity, yet the installation of these panels is allowed to be done by non-licensed contractors. HB5151 requires that wiring, grounding, bonding and fastening solar panels will require the skill of a licensed electrician or apprentice. The loophole of the 2007 Energy Bill needs to be closed for the safety of state residents and to help create good paying jobs for people of our state.

Kimberly Glassman, Director, Foundation for Fair Contracting of Connecticut, Inc.

Ms. Glassman supports this bill. HB5151 focuses on the regulation of solar licensing by aiming to enhance safety standards and proficiency in the installation of solar photovoltaic panels. It mandates that individuals have proper licensure or registration, including apprentices, are exclusively responsible for overseeing critical aspects such as wiring, grounding and bonding within photovoltaic systems. Requiring this full licensure through the completion of an apprenticeship program will ensure the State of Connecticut will provide a more skilled workforce of electricians and safer working condition.

Ed Hawthorne, President, Connecticut AFL-CIO

Mr. Hawthorne supports this bill. Connecticut's electrical apprenticeship training programs provide individuals with a career pathway that includes good wages, healthcare, and retirement benefits. This statute will expand the opportunity for good middle class jobs. Under this bill unlicensed workers would continue to be permitted to unload, uncrate and move solar collectors and photovoltaic panels on the jobsite while carpenters, laborers and operating engineers can perform pile driving, concrete work and installation of ground screw supports and racking supports. With an effective date of 10/1/2026 there would be ample time for individuals to register as PV apprentices to pursue a career in solar installation.

Michael Maconyi, Executive Director, Connecticut Chapter, National Electrical Contractors Association

Mr. Maconyi supports this bill. This bill provides a pathway for individuals to secure a rewarding career. Having a skilled person trained in handling electricity is a matter of important public policy and eliminating the PV exemption is the right thing to do. Since the passage of the PV segment of past legislation solar arrays are larger and more complex. The voltage they produce is much higher; imagine an untrained worker handling 1000 volts of electricity. There is a real possibility without the passage of this bill. Electricity generated by a PV panel is no different from all other electricity and should therefore require licensing. Other New England states require electrical licenses to perform PV installations and Connecticut should follow suit.

Aziz Dehkan, Executive Director and Allison Pilcher, Policy Director, CT Roundtable on Climate & Jobs.

CT Roundtable on Climate & Jobs supports this bill. Connecticut has increasingly received federal funds to foster green energy and development and the state is following suit with its own investments. Connecticut has an excellent apprenticeship program and should be proud of this as it allows workers to enter a long-term career path. The electrical field is evolving with advancement in technology. HB5151 is invaluable to upholding the rigorous standards fostering excellence within the solar industry, for both customers and workers.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Jason Calabrese, Operations Manager, Ion Solar

Mr. Calabrese opposes this bill. Requiring that all residential solar workers to have an electrical license would devastate the residential solar installation in Connecticut. As the electricity rates in Connecticut rise, residents will look to solar to help with lowering their electrical bills. The passing of this bill would eliminate the relief that they would get from having solar installed. It is exceedingly difficult to find licensed electricians to do the work. All things considered, HB5151 will be a huge step-back for Connecticut in a thriving solar industry. It will be doubtful that Connecticut will reach its goal of obtaining energy from zero carbon sources by 2040 if this bill passes.

Chelsea Farrell, Policy and Legislative Associate, Trinity Solar

Ms. Farrell opposes this bill. This will have a negative impact on solar installation companies and their workers. Trinity Solar has over fifty licensed electricians, ten apprentices, two PV-2 electricians, eleven PV apprentices and seventy-six installers who play an integral role in the installation of solar systems for families. Many tasks involved in solar installation do not involve electrical work. The current licensing is adequate for all who complete the installation. Installing a racking system does not require an electrician and may be completed by a skilled construction worker without issue. This bill would disrupt solar installation and have an adverse effect on our state's workforce.

Bill Giglio, Sun Wind Solutions, LLC

Mr. Giglio opposes this bill. Connecticut already has a shortage of licensed electricians. This bill will ascorbate the problem. Unions need to identify how CT is going to fulfill the requirement in a timely fashion. The labor cost would be beyond tolerable or sustainable. Most electricians do not want to do heavy lifting. All tasks requiring a license should be identified. Aren't current regulations and codes already in place to address these issues?

Alice Horgan, Government Affairs Manager, Sunnova Energy

Ms. Horgan opposes this bill. All installers and dealers of Sunnova partners have up to date business licenses, comply with all regulations and have proper certification to perform the various aspects of installation of a rooftop solar system. By requiring a license for placement and anchoring for paneling you would be requiring a licensed electrician to do non-electrical work. It is currently the responsibility of the licensed contractor to ensure that the work is done properly, and any recourse is against the licensee if it is not. Connecticut has some of the highest electricity rates in the country we should not be penalizing customers seeking to install rooftop solar or small businesses who play a role in addressing our climate crisis.

Chris Lobdell, PurePoint Energy

Mr. Lobdell opposes this bill. This bill would impact the well-being of the current workforce who are employed at PurePoint Energy. PurePoint Energy takes issue with the statement "the wiring of modules, fastening, all grounding and bonding of the photovoltaic system should be performed only by individuals with proper licensure or registered apprentices". All jobs are reviewed by Green Bank, EDCs and Building Officials. They also have their own QA/QC inspections and meet with install teams on a regular basis. They have been in business since 2007 and this proposed change in licensing would not improve this part of the work. Many agencies are involved in the planning, preparing, executing, reviewing and

approving of a solar job. There are already mechanisms in place to ensure that the work is done by highly skilled and entry level workers working together.

Bronte Payne, Manager, Policy and Strategy, SunPower

Mr. Payne opposes this bill. As written this bill would remove the ability for trained and skilled rooftop solar installers, that are employees of licensed contractors to perform placement and anchoring of solar collectors or photovoltaic panels without a license. Currently all electrical components are being done by licensed electricians per existing law. This bill would exacerbate existing workforce shortages, slowing down the installation of rooftop solar for consumers and impact the state's ability to transition to clean energy.

Autumn Sylvestri, Tri-State Renewable Resources, LLC

Ms. Sylvestri opposes this bill. Tri-State Renewable Resources has been in business for 10 years. This regulation will put the company out of business. Currently they cannot find enough electricians to complete all the work and work on thin margins. This would end small businesses in the state.

Steven Salansky, President, SAVKAT SOLAR

Mr. Salansky opposes this bill. This bill will add expense and more red tape to an industry that already has plenty of bureaucracy. This would add more expense which would be passed on to the consumer. The last thing the world need is to slow down the adoption of renewables.

One hundred and fifteen people submitted testimony in opposition of this bill.

This bill in its current form will do irreparable harm to both the solar installers and consumers. It will hinder the state's goals for clean energy by 2040. There is no value to adding trained roofers and experienced laborers on a residential solar job. A typical solar installation already requires an apprentice or a licensed electrician to be on the crew. This bill is not beneficial to any party. It would increase the cost of solar to the consumer and will add to the time of installation. This bill would cause many to lose the jobs that they currently have in installing solar. To improve clean energy targets, we need to be removing roadblock.

Reported by: Bonnie Gray, Assistant Clerk

DATE: 3/19/2024