

To:

Governor Charles Baker

Speaker of the House Robert DeLeo

Senate President Karen Spilka

Members of the 191st General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

We, the undersigned elected and appointed officials of 20 municipalities from across the Commonwealth, write with concern about the direction of our solar industry, and about creating policies that will allow all residents to enjoy the benefits of this emerging technology. We ask that you each in your capacity address the problems laid out here, and help to meet the needs of our mutual constituents.

In a short decade, through a combination of policy stewardship and robust demand from consumers, Massachusetts has established and seen enormous growth of an entirely new clean energy economy. We have repeatedly surpassed ambitious targets for uptake of promising technologies, created a policy framework that encourages sustainable growth and guides us down a path to meet critical climate mandates, and set up our economy as a national leader with a significant 'first-mover advantage' in this regard.

Still, despite rapidly falling prices and the massive popularity of these technologies, we have failed to ensure that important segments of our population receive the many benefits of this clean energy boom. In particular, solar energy has provided dramatic cost savings and contributed to lowering air and climate pollution in many communities, but significant portions of our communities, disproportionately comprised of lower income households and communities of color, remain outside the programs we have devised to encourage a sustainable energy sector.

Under the new state solar program, Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target (SMART), less than 3% of projects qualify as low-income, despite a statewide poverty rate over 10%. This does not capture whether those low-income projects saved money, how much, and who benefited. Neither does it reflect the lack of accessibility of solar for those who are working class but above the poverty rate, renters, non-English speakers and others facing structural barriers to access. State solar policies effectively exclude approximately half the Commonwealth's population, despite every ratepayer paying into utility-run solar programs.

The good news is this is a problem that we can solve, and in the near term. There are roles that each branch and department can play:

Legislature

The Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy recently held a hearing on several bills that make solar power more accessible to low- and moderate-income (LMI) households, and will be considering them over the coming weeks and months, including the following of particular relevance:

- H.2877 and S.1931, *An Act relative to solar power in environmental justice and urban communities*;
- H.2843, *An Act removing barriers to solar for low-income communities*;
- S.1956, *An Act ensuring access to solar energy for all communities*.

We ask that legislators actively support and work to pass these bills. Chairs and members of the TUE Committee should advance these bills without delay or weakening amendments. Other legislators and Governor Baker, we ask that you submit written testimony to the TUE Committee, and advocate for passage of these bills with colleagues and leadership. In addition, we ask that if and when the legislature takes up any legislation regarding solar power, you speak up to ensure there are provisions included that fix this longstanding injustice. Lastly, we urge the Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight to convene a hearing this session on why solar programs are failing LMI populations.

Administration

- The Department of Energy Resources (DOER) is currently reviewing a new incentive mechanism for solar development, and we strongly recommend building in a realistic and viable pathway for low- and moderate-income communities to participate. This could take the form of a carve-out or simply allowing LMI households to receive the original subsidy rate. As DOER considers new siting rules within its SMART program that may have dramatically negative impacts on the ability of developers to implement community shared solar projects, preventing the likely disproportionate impact on LMI ratepayers and communities of color must also be a critical outcome.
- The Department of Public Utilities hears utility rate cases and other relevant dockets on a regular basis, and may be able to build in requirements to address disparities. Meeting this responsibility will say much about how seriously the administration takes equity.
- The Massachusetts Clean Energy Center designs programs to explore and expand clean energy implementation around the state, but their current programs tend to focus on households that are only marginally excluded from solar energy. However, they have a special responsibility and the means to create mechanisms in these programs that overcome significant equity barriers related to class, race and language isolation. We ask that programs are designed in

collaboration with excluded communities and constituencies that face the largest barriers to solar uptake.

Thank you for your attention to these questions of basic fairness, which have been consistently underappreciated and languished unaddressed for years. Finally fixing the underlying problems will help our most vulnerable constituents meet basic needs, and also help reach the state's ambitious climate emissions reduction targets mandated by law. We look forward to seeing your efforts lead to the successful deployment of a robust and equitable clean energy industry in the Commonwealth in coming years.

Sincerely,

Roger A. Cabral, Selectman, Acushnet
Lydia Edwards, City Councilor, Boston
Matt O'Malley, City Councilor, Boston
Anne Beauregard, Councilor At Large, Brockton
Susan Nicastro, Ward 4 City Councilor, Brockton
Martha Simon, School Committee Member, Burlington
Quinton Y. Zondervan, City Councillor, Cambridge
Thomas G. Ambrosino, City Manager, Chelsea
Daniel C. Bennett, Selectman, Danvers
Thomas Peake, City Councilor, Easthampton
Eileen J. Marum, Planning Board Clerk, Marion
Manisha Bewtra, Councilor-At-Large, Melrose
Joaquim "Jack" Livramento, School Committee, New Bedford
Colleen Dawicki, New Bedford School Committee, New Bedford
Dana Rebeiro, Councilor Ward 4, New Bedford
Emily Norton, City Councilor, Newton
Susan Albright, City Councilor, Newton
Alisa Klein, City Councilor, Northampton
Ben Ewen-Campen, City Councilor, Somerville
Tom Hutcheson, Town Administrator for the Board of Selectmen, Conway
Holly Jones, Conservation Agent, Uxbridge
Jim Huebner, Select Board Chair, Washington
Tony Palomba, Councilor-At Large, Watertown
Anne O'Connor, Select Board Member, Williamstown
Gary Rosen, City Councilor-At-Large, Worcester

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cc:

Secretary Kathleen Theoharides, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

Commissioner Judith Judson, MA Department of Energy Resources

Chairman Matthew Nelson, MA Department of Public Utilities

CEO Stephen Pike, MA Clean Energy Center