



July 11, 2017

Commissioner Judith Judson  
Department of Energy Resources  
100 Cambridge Street #1020  
Boston, MA 02114

CC: Michael Judge, Kaitlin Kelly, Department of Energy Resources

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**Dear Commissioner Judson:**

**RE: SMART solar incentive program**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the next-stage solar incentive program (SMART). We write on behalf of the Green Justice Coalition, a convening of community organizations, environmental groups and labor unions.

Every member of our communities deserves access to clean energy, and we are deeply concerned about the proposed solar incentive's impact on low-income and shared solar projects, which are critical for expanding clean energy to renters, low- and moderate-income communities, urban residents and communities of color.

Specifically, we are concerned about the restrictions on equity "adders," the restrictive definition of "low-income" and the lack of clarity around delivering savings directly to ratepayers through an on-bill mechanism. We strongly encourage the DOER to consider environmental justice criteria in the design of its clean energy incentives in order to align policy goals, expand access to low and moderate income residents and use a pre-existing classification to help steer incentives.

We do not represent solar developers, nor is the bottom-line of any solar company our priority. However, we believe there are legitimate concerns regarding the inadequacy of the proposed solar incentives that could threaten the development of shared solar projects, thereby excluding members of our communities from accessing solar. Additionally, we note that restrictions on net metering, rate design changes and recent cuts to solar programs have endangered or derailed community and low-income solar projects and urge our state to move in a different direction with great haste.

We have yet to hear from DOER how the administration plans to meaningfully address the concerns raised in prior communications and reiterated in this letter. To be specific, DOER has not responded to concerns delivered via phone, email or written or oral comments, has not disclosed the time or location of most stakeholder sessions to discuss the design of the solar program when asked, and even suggested at a single public forum on January 31, 2017 that the public should expect some people to be left out of the state's solar programs.

We ask the DOER to engage in dialogue around and subsequently act on our concerns with the SMART program. Specifically, we urge the DOER to take action on:

*Creating equity carve-out or set-aside:* The DOER should ensure that a portion of the incentive serves low-moderate income communities by dedicating a percent of the incentive specifically to this purpose. Small residential solar sector has a carve-out, or dedicated portion of the incentive, in the new SMART program, presumably established to protect that segment of the industry. It would be only sensible to do the same for segments of ratepayers, i.e. low-moderate income ratepayers, by dedicating part of the incentive to them or to shared solar projects.

*Ensuring compensation levels are sufficient to develop low-income and community shared solar, and remove caps on adders:* Significant concerns have arisen around the feasibility of the development of low-moderate income solar projects under the currently proposed solar incentive program, and the level of compensation in SMART may severely inhibit the growth of low income solar. For all communities to enjoy the benefits of solar energy, projects serving them must actually be built. The DOER should provide a mechanism for regular review of these levels, with specific attention to whether the program is expanding access to solar. Fundamentally, if the state wants to see more low-income solar projects, weakening compensation will not spur additional growth, and beyond project feasibility under the general incentive, adders to incentivize equity should not be capped or otherwise expire.

*Revising restrictive definition of low-income:* Currently, the DOER is focused primarily on the R-2 rate class, customers on the low-income discount rate. We fully support the inclusion of R-2 customers, but many renters and moderate-income consumers would actually be left out of this definition. We urge the DOER to include renters and moderate-income ratepayers in its programs. One pathway for achieving this without extensive income-qualification programs would be to additionally incentivize solar projects in Environmental Justice communities.

*Creating guidelines to ensure customers receive equitable benefit:* The DOER is considering a mechanism to provide direct, on-bill benefits to solar customers, which is currently only available through solar net metering. It is currently unclear how such a replacement would or could work or whether customers would be fairly compensated. Establishing clear, equitable guidelines for this proposal is essential—otherwise, DOER should partner with the legislature to restore compensation for and eliminate barriers to solar net metering.

We understand solar policy is complex and that the development of the current policy framework has required months of efforts by DOER staff. We are grateful for your diligence, and also believe that for good policy solutions to be reached, all communities need to be represented at the table. We thank you for your attention to these issues and welcome dialogue on ensuring equitable access to solar power in Massachusetts.

Regards,

The Green Justice Coalition and member groups  
Alternatives for Community and Environment  
Boston Climate Action Network  
Chelsea GreenRoots  
Chinese Progressive Association  
Clean Water Action  
Coalition for Social Justice  
Community Labor United  
Neighbor to Neighbor  
Rev. Mariama White-Hammond / Bethel AME Church  
Youth on Board