



VOTE SOLAR

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Testimony re Climate and Community Investment Act

Good morning/afternoon. My name is Stephan Roundtree, Jr. I'm a resident of Northern Manhattan and Northeast Director with the 501(c)3 nonprofit Vote Solar. I am a member of the board of Directors with NYSEIA, and I also serve on the CAC's Power Generation Advisory Panel. I'm testifying here on behalf of Vote Solar.

Vote Solar is a 501(c)3 nonprofit whose mission is to promote solar energy as a mainstream resource in a socially just way. We work closely with the solar industry in the various northeast states as well environmental justice and environmental organizations. Thank you all for the opportunity to testify in favor of the CCIA

The CLCPA requires that we rapidly scale up our green economy, while rapidly scaling down the fossil economy in an environmentally just way. CCIA is laser-focused on driving those outcomes, while fortifying the most disadvantaged New Yorkers against both financial burdens, and the harsh physical impacts of our destabilizing climate.

New York's energy generation capacity is still overwhelmingly met with natural gas, nuclear, and legacy hydroelectric power. Currently about 2.5% of NY's electricity is generated from solar. Vote solar recently commissioned lowest-cost 100% renewable grid scenario study with partner Vibrant Clean Energy: the model shows that to most cost-effectively meet our decarbonization mandate; by 2040 roughly 50% of New York's electricity should come from utility and distribution scale solar power. By 2030 this would require an increase of roughly 150% for distributed solar from 2018 levels, and well over 1700% increase in utility-scale solar. Current progress to date has the state about halfway its way to meet the 6GW distributed solar goal for 2025 (from zero), but with scant assurances that the next five years to 2030 will see the parabolic upswing need to meet our goals.

To be blunt, there's a massive discrepancy between what existing funding is capable of delivering, and what's needed to meet overall decarbonization mandates. NYSERDA and DPS have taken steps to promote the marketplace for solar, and by that standard, we've made a great deal of progress. But a "mass-market" approach isn't sufficient for our decarbonization mandate. We need swift, comprehensive changes to our energy system, which the current funding sources, largely designated to incentivize private investment, are in my view, incapable of delivering.

This discrepancy between what's needed and what's available is most keenly felt by black and brown New Yorkers, and poor New Yorkers of any race. While market incentives work for some, and has buoyed the NY solar industry, it's mostly an ineffective approach for communities across New York's state who are facing unjust barriers to participation due to historical racism and disenfranchisement. Furthermore, while existing primary funding sources for utility and NYSERDA programming are largely regressive; i.e. they are funded via utility bills which are disproportionately

expensive to poor New Yorkers, CCIA is the inverse: It derives funding from the economic actors who profit from damaging our environment and communities, and direct those revenues towards the activities that will allow communities to repair that damage. In short - CCIA grows the pot, and shifts benefits and burdens in favor of the unjustly burdened.

A bit more on solar:

Solar can provide diverse, steady, employment; reduced energy costs; and improve local air quality. When paired with local storage and islanding capability, it can provide needed storm and extreme heat resiliency. Right now there are approximately 10k solar jobs in the state and over 600 employers; Vote Solar's modeling shows that NY's least cost transition to clean energy will create over 14k new utility-scale solar jobs by 2030, over 25k distributed or local solar jobs, as well as over 58K new solar thermal jobs by 2030, building to over 140k by 2040. This model illustrates this future as being less expensive to ratepayers overall than BAU, and would provide a myriad of new health and economic benefits to residents.

As previously noted, healthy market conditions are important to any sector, but the solar industry isn't only serving itself or its customers; It's a key component of how we stabilize the climate and protect our society. As such, our solutions cannot solely be market incentives focused. We should be funding our energy transition with the actual transition goals in mind, not simply those of market growth.

In prior work, I've seen how partnership between community non-profits and the solar industry has yielded impressive outcomes for residents and workers. My local EJ org and former employer WE ACT for Environmental Justice, along with partner Solar One took a modest grant from the City of New York and turned it into rooftop solar for 14 affordable co-op buildings (and counting), which led to a budding POC worker-owned solar installation business, which currently has over a million dollars worth of work in the pipeline in NYC and the Hudson Valley. Industry partners were at the table throughout, and benefitted from the Northern Manhattan community's ability to identify our own needs and organize to meet them. Projects in Buffalo, South Brooklyn and elsewhere are further examples of what a green economy can look like when structural barriers are neutralized through public investment. This work is only the tip of the iceberg for what CCIA can deliver for New Yorkers. CCIA will provide new dedicated funding for these community-led projects, providing new opportunities for businesses to build with communities that had previously been boxed out.

The Power Generation Advisory panel is working extra hard to pull together the best recommendations to transition New York's energy system off of fossil fuels and develop a reliable green energy grid in the next 20 years. Throughout the process, I remain concerned that the execution of planning will be unsuccessful without significant increases in public investment. We can create ideal regulatory structures, but we cannot make a six-egg omelet with three eggs. Similarly, It is necessary but insufficient to invite businesspeople to NY with favorable market conditions and incentives. Disadvantaged NYers have unfairly paid for the climate crisis already. For the transition to work, polluters must now pay their share.

Thank you

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