



MONTANA RENEWABLE ENERGY ASSOCIATION

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January 22, 2019

To: Senate Energy and Telecommunications Committee

Regarding: Senate Bill 93, Require decommissioning and bonding for certain solar

Chairman Ankney and Members of the Senate Energy and Telecommunications Committee,

I am writing to express the Montana Renewable Energy Association's (MREA) concerns and opposition to Senate Bill 93. MREA represents solar, small wind, micro-hydro, and other renewable energy technology installers, as well as consumers and supports of these technologies.

This bill is discriminatory against renewable energy development. In 2016, Montana saw the dawn of large-scale solar development with six new projects that are providing clean, renewable energy to our state. These six projects were all in the 2 to 3 megawatt range in size. Solar facilities do not have a large environmental impact. They are stationary and require little upkeep. In addition, solar panel technology is rapidly progressing and increasing in efficiency, meaning the same physical panel can now produce more energy. This is greatly reducing the amount of space that solar facilities need to generate the same amount of energy.

Although considered "utility-scale", these two to three megawatt facilities are on the small end of the spectrum. They are small enough that a single, large energy user (like a university) could satisfy its energy needs from the facility. Montana State University is developing a one megawatt solar array that will only provide energy on campus – it will not export energy to the grid. If a solar facility reaches the end of its life for the utility, there are other ways to continue producing public benefits. Indeed, solar panels remain highly efficient as they age.

Large scale solar development is an opportunity for Montana's solar industry to develop and grow into new development markets. To date, the solar industry in Montana has primarily developed smaller, distributed generation projects ranging from 1 kilo-watt up to 50 kilo-watts. However, more installers are developing larger projects that would be affected by this bill. Legislative road blocks, such as unnecessary restrictions on the net metering program, have prevented the industry from the explosive growth it has the potential to achieve. This bill would create more red tape that would unnecessarily hinder small business growth in Montana.

I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 93.

Thank you,

Andrew J. Valainis
Executive Director