

Draft Written Testimony for Energy Committee Hearing

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Michigan Energy Options is a clean energy nonprofit that has been in continuous operation since 1978. Today, we work with utilities on energy efficiency programs, the State of Michigan on solar projects, and with local governments, businesses, and residents on community solar parks.

We helped bring online the Marquette community solar park with the utility there. And on January 1, 2019, in East Lansing, we brought online Mid-Michigan's first community solar park. Chair Bellino was kind enough to join for a tour earlier this summer. My experiences developing these projects are exactly why I think HB 4715 and HB 4716 are needed.

The East Lansing Community Solar Park took five years to complete and is the result of a collective effort by the Lansing Board of Water & Light, City of East Lansing and Pivot Energy. Participating BWL customers are supporting solar power by leasing panels. We have 150 distinct participants, which include households, houses of faith, businesses, local governments and nonprofits. The park has 1,000 solar panels and it is located on two acres of a closed, capped landfill. We have restored the habitat onsite as well with native wildflowers and grasses.

It wasn't easy because Michigan's existing laws make it difficult for communities to choose community solar and because at that time, there were few previous models anywhere because community solar was just taking off. Now, we have models to look at from all over the country, but we still have a legislative framework that makes it nearly impossible for community solar to grow in Michigan.

Michigan Energy Options is working on more community solar parks across the state, finding ways to creatively develop novel projects and shoehorning them into the existing policy. The projects we've worked on and the one's to come have given me a few things to share as takeaways:

First, our community solar park provided for those who could not adopt rooftop solar a way to choose renewable energy as part of our State's transition away from fossil fuels. Unfortunately, few Michigan residents have this option based on current accessibility to community solar.

Second, The State of Michigan has an inventory of more than 50,000 brownfields across both peninsulas that are prime for community solar. In East Lansing we purposely chose a brownfield because we knew locating solar on a former landfill would not compete with potential other redevelopment for the City of East Lansing. Other communities could do the same under the bills being discussed here today.

Third, we had to overcome hesitancy by the utility, by the city, even by would-be participants because community solar was so novel. But that was nothing compared to the challenge of Michigan's lack of laws or policies in place to address community solar. And we still don't have that framework today, which makes it hard for the lessons learned from our projects to lead to widespread adoption.

Thank you and if any of the committee members or their staff would like a tour of our park, I'm at the ready.