



B21-0650 – Renewable Portfolio Standard Expansion Amendment Act of 2016

Date: May 23, 2016
Committee: Transportation and the Environment

Position: Favorable

Comments:

The Chesapeake Climate Action Network respectfully requests a favorable report from the Committee on Transportation and the Environment on B21-0650 – Renewable Portfolio Standard Expansion Amendment Act of 2016.

Over half of D.C.’s electricity still comes from fossil fuels like coal, oil and natural gas. These dirty fuels are bad for our health, our economy, our climate, and our energy security. With \$4.6 billion of property value at risk due to flooding driven by sea-level rise, and with some of the worst air quality on the East Coast, D.C. needs to act now to curb our dependence on fossil fuels.¹ And clean energy has already proven itself to be a powerful driver of economic development in the District, including job creation.

That’s why a broad and diverse coalition of environmentalists, public health officials, business leaders, labor leaders, faith leaders, academics, low-income advocates and social justice advocates have come together to call on D.C. leaders to increase the District’s renewable portfolio standard to 50% by 2032.

Implementing the Sustainable D.C. Plan

The 2012 Sustainable D.C. plan set a goal to “increase the use of renewable energy to make up 50% of the District’s energy supply” by 2032. That has been the stated policy of the District for four years. This legislation is simply an implementation mechanism to achieve that policy, and start realizing the associated environmental, public health, and economic benefits. With other leadership states across the country also increasing their RPS targets, now is the right time to take similar actions to implement to Sustainable D.C. plan.

Helping Low-Income Residents

Low-income residents will be especially helped by this legislation through the “Solar for All” program that seeks to extend the benefits of solar energy to every low-income household in the District. This

¹ Washington, D.C. and the Surging Sea. Rep. Climate Central, Sept. 2014.
<<http://sealevel.climatecentral.org/uploads/ssrf/DC-Report.pdf>>

program will significantly lower energy bills for low-income District residents while also reducing air pollution and climate change emissions.

There is a critical need now to begin deploying solar in low-income communities and to develop effective project models and policies to scale this deployment quickly and broadly. On an individual level, low-income households spend an average of 15 to 20 percent of their income on energy bills. This puts a strain on already tight budgets and makes families significantly more susceptible to rising energy costs. Helping households save money on electricity directly translates into a family's ability to better cover other basic needs, including food, housing costs, education, and medical expenses. On a macro level, renewable energy provides broad community benefits, including local jobs, economic growth, private investment, and lower rates of pollution. In short, solar provides significant benefits to the members of society that need them most.²

Health Benefits

Fossil fuel combustion is a public health crisis. Washington D.C. has an "F" air quality grade from the American Lung Association, and the District notoriously has some of the worst ground-level ozone pollution in the eastern U.S. These health burdens harm low-income people and people of color disproportionately. More clean energy will significantly improve the District's air quality while preventing 27 to 60 premature deaths per year and increasing regional economic growth by \$253 million to \$572 million annually due to better health outcomes.³

Economic Benefits

Currently, D.C. has over 250 clean energy companies, and the solar industry already employs 1,000 people throughout the District. Those companies are ready to hire more workers if the law gives them room to grow. By passing this legislation, D.C. can double its number of solar jobs, and create career pathways that have a median starting salary of \$17 - \$21 per hour. That's money earned and spent here in the District.

Climate Benefits

A 50% clean electricity standard will create incentives for roughly 1,500 megawatts of new clean energy in our region and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by over 2.4 million metric tons per year. That's the

² "Why Solar for Low-income Communities?" Community Power Network, <<http://communitypowernetwork.com/node/9486>>

³ Based on data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Avoided Emissions and Generation Tool (AVERT) and Co-Benefits Risk Assessment Screening (COBRA) model. Assumes 1,280 MW of wind development and 242 MW of solar development as a result of this bill.

carbon equivalent of taking 500,000 passenger vehicles off the road every year, which will also deliver improved public health outcomes, cleaner air and cleaner water.⁴

Reliability Benefits

Weather in our region is getting more intense, and our electricity grid is increasingly compromised by climate-related hazards, including more intense storms and heat waves. Dispersed and locally generated electricity that doesn't emit greenhouse gases is a more sustainable solution to our energy needs than our current system of centralized, polluting power plants. More clean power will make our electricity grid more resilient and keep our lights on, even during increasingly extreme weather events.

50% Clean Energy is Achievable in the District

There is more than enough wind energy available to meet a higher RPS. Wind and solar are now the fastest growing source of power in the United States – representing 62 percent of all new U.S. electric generation in 2015.⁵ Wind and solar prices have already fallen by over half in the past five years, while solar power has grown in the District by 3,200% since 2009.

There is already more than enough wind power in the queue waiting to be built to meet a 50% RPS goal. In fact, D.C. could meet the new wind power goals in this bill using just 11% of the wind capacity that is already in the queue to be built in our region.⁶ And that doesn't even include wind power from states adjacent to PJM—our regional grid operator—which is also eligible for D.C.'s RPS.

As for solar, the National Renewable Energy Laboratory has found that Washington D.C. has enough available rooftop space to accommodate 2 Gigawatts (GW) of solar, which is nearly 4 times more than would be required with a 5% carve-out.⁷ The solar targets in this legislation are just a fraction of what D.C. needs to do to be the healthiest, greenest, most livable city in the nation.

⁴ Emissions reductions based on EPA's Avoided Emissions and Generation Tool (AVERT) model. Passenger vehicles off the road estimate from EPA's Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator <<https://www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator>>

⁵ Office of Energy Projects Energy Infrastructure Update for December 2015. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Jan. 2016. <<https://www.ferc.gov/legal/staff-reports/2015/dec-infrastructure.pdf>>

⁶ Based on projects listed as "under study" and "under construction" in PJM's Generation Queue. <<http://www.pjm.com/planning/generation-interconnection/generation-queue-active.aspx>>

⁷ Lopez, Anthony, Billy Roberts, Donna Heimiller, Nate Blair, and Gian Porro. U.S. Renewable Energy Technical Potentials: A GIS-Based Analysis. Rep. no. NREL/TP-6A20-51946. National Renewable Energy Laboratory, July 2012. <<http://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy12osti/51946.pdf>>