

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We appreciate the leadership of Governor Murphy, President Fiordaliso, the Board and staff to usher in a new era of clean energy that is essential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce public health impacts and create a prosperous green economy.

We support the continued, sustainable growth of solar energy as a key component of the clean energy portfolio needed to address climate change and meet the emissions reductions targets of the Energy Master Plan and Global Warming Response Act.

Recent science regarding the climate crisis necessitates that we act with greater urgency. Our clean energy policies must maximize the tons of greenhouse gas emissions achieved, which can be best accomplished through a smart mix of in-state solar and regional solar and wind projects, in combination with responsibly developing New Jersey's offshore wind potential.

As we continue to develop solar energy in New Jersey we must take care not to undermine the state's long-standing commitment to preserving our best farmlands needed to keep the garden in the garden state, and avoid clearing our forests that play a vital role in storing carbon among many other benefits.

We generally support the staff recommendation on solar siting, which aligns with the Energy Master Plan, encouraging development of solar facilities on the built environment and marginal lands away from open spaces, high value agricultural lands and forests.

The state should not incentivize solar development on our best soils in Agricultural Development Areas, which the state and counties have identified as critical to the long-term viability of agriculture. It isn't necessary to do so, as analysis from the SADC shows that approximately 100,000 acres of farmland could be available for solar excluding farmland with the best soils in the ADAs. The provision in the straw proposal to allow up to 5% of the best soils within ADAs to be put into solar, subject to approval by BPU, is unnecessary and could result in projects that undermine high value agricultural resources.

For example, several massive proposed solar developments on prime farmland within ADAs in Salem and Warren counties, over 800 and 600 acres respectively, are a warning of what future solar development in New Jersey could look like if this 5% exception is allowed. In the most densely populated state in the nation where prime farmland and open spaces are cherished, we can do better than that.

Dual-use opportunities should be evaluated, but only on marginal farmlands, not as an excuse to put solar on our best farmland soils where it doesn't belong. We simply don't know enough about the viability of dual-use solar and the potential to restore lands put into solar development back to full-scale agriculture in the future.

The Community Solar Pilot Program has been a resounding success due to its emphasis on bringing the benefits of solar to underserved communities, and promotion of well-sited solar projects on brownfields, landfills, parking lots and rooftops.

We urge you to take the same care in designing a successor program that will enable the state to achieve urgent emissions reductions within a clean energy budget, put the industry and solar jobs on a sustainable footing, and result in well-sited projects that don't compromise our best farmland soils or forests.

Thank you