

February 14, 2022

Agriculture Committee
Attn: House Study Bill 697
Re: Center for Rural Affairs Statement of Support

The Center for Rural Affairs is a private non-profit organization, established in 1973 and based in Lyons, Nebraska with an office in Nevada, Iowa. The Center works to promote economic opportunity, environmental stewardship, and policies that strengthen rural communities. This includes efforts to equitably advance renewable energy opportunities for rural Iowans.

I. General comments

Solar energy projects are becoming more common across Iowa, and they present an undeniable opportunity for rural communities and residents. Iowa ranks 16th in technical potential for solar photovoltaic energy production, and 30th in installed solar capacity.¹² As of November, 2021, the state had at least 293.6 megawatts (MW) of total installed solar capacity, according to the Energy Information Agency.³ This is up from 2 MW installed in 2012.⁴

There is significant potential for the growth of solar energy development and utilization in Iowa. HSB 697 would encourage investment in distributed solar by making projects more efficient and accessible. Virtual net metering will help create a more reliable and flexible power grid while allowing Iowans to save money on their energy bills. This is especially true for rural Iowans who have multiple electricity meters or, due to geographic or financial factors, lack access to solar resources.

II. Impact to local residents and farmers

While the cost of solar energy has decreased by 11% over the past 5 years, solar is still a large expense for the average Iowan.⁵ A shared solar net-metering cooperative program would allow for virtual net-metering which is one way for more Iowans to have the ability to invest in community solar. The bill credits received for excess energy produced proportionate to the size of the investor's subscription reduce the subscriber's monthly electricity bill, thereby creating a more accessible energy program for Iowans.

¹ "Real potential, ready today: Solar energy in Iowa." Iowa Environmental Council, [iaenvironment.org/webres/File/Program%20Publications/2015_solar_handout.pdf](https://www.iaenvironment.org/webres/File/Program%20Publications/2015_solar_handout.pdf). February 13, 2022.

² "State Solar Spotlight: Iowa." Solar Energy Industries Association, [seia.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/Iowa%20Solar-Factsheet-2021-Q4.pdf](https://www.seia.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/Iowa%20Solar-Factsheet-2021-Q4.pdf). February 13, 2022.

³ "Electric Power Monthly: Table 6.2.B." U.S. Energy Information Agency, November 24, 2021, [eia.gov/electricity/monthly/epm_table_grapher.php?t=table_6_02_b](https://www.eia.gov/electricity/monthly/epm_table_grapher.php?t=table_6_02_b). February 13, 2022.

⁴ "Iowa Solar Energy Fact Sheet." Iowa Environmental Council, January, 2021, <https://www.iaenvironment.org/webres/File/Solar%20Energy%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%202021.pdf>. February 13, 2022.

⁵ "Iowa Solar." Solar Energy and Industries Association, <https://www.seia.org/state-solar-policy/iowa-solar>. February 13, 2022.

Furthermore, distributed energy resources, such as community solar developments, reduce the pressure on the electric grid. Iowans who are unable to afford the upfront costs of installing a home solar system would be able to invest in a community solar project and realize equivalent benefits in reduced energy costs and grid resiliency. Residents who invest in these resources should be compensated for their contributions to the grid.

A shared solar net-metering cooperative program would also allow Iowa farmers with multiple solar arrays and meters on various buildings to consolidate them onto one virtual meter. Meter aggregation is a more financially efficient way to generate and transmit distributed energy resources. This saves time and money for both the utility and Iowa solar owners with multiple meters, allowing Iowa farmers to be more economically competitive. Meter aggregation would also benefit other entities with multiple meters such as businesses with multiple buildings or local public entities like school districts, cities, or counties all of which could have multiple properties on separate meters.⁶ Cost savings for public entities can be passed on to taxpayers, potentially saving Iowan's money on their tax burdens.

III. Conclusion

As Iowa looks to the future, programs that advance equity, opportunity, and sustainability should be at the forefront for consideration. The creation of a shared solar net-metering cooperative program would open up investment in a local and renewable source of energy to more Iowans. HSB 697 is a step in the right direction for Iowa.

Respectfully submitted,



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⁶ Barnes, Chelsea. "Aggregate Net Metering: Opportunities for Local Governments." North Carolina Solar Center, July, 2013, <https://icleiusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Aggregate-Net-Metering-Opportunities-for-Local-Governments.pdf>. February 13, 2022.