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## **Pennsylvanians Overwhelmingly Favor Bringing Community Solar to Keystone State and Want Legislative Action**

By: Anthony Campisi

As Pennsylvania legislators return to fall session this September, new polling shows 77% of Pennsylvania voters want their representatives to pass a bill that would give them the option to subscribe to a community solar project and over 60% would consider subscribing to a local community solar project if one were available to them.

The polling, conducted by Pennsylvania-based Susquehanna Polling and Research, found consistently high levels of bipartisan support for community solar in both rural and urban regions across the commonwealth. Moreover, 81% of the commonwealth's voters support the ability of customers and businesses to have more choices about where and how they buy their energy- whatever it may be- so that they can make the most cost-effective decisions for them.

Consumers across the commonwealth are working to turn this support into action. They're advocating to the Pennsylvania General Assembly for approval of legislation that would permit community solar projects as soon as possible.

Unlike traditional rooftop projects in which homeowners or business owners pay to install solar arrays on their own properties, community solar allows local communities to join together and purchase solar energy from a nearby array, which is often co-located on nearby farmland. The small-scale projects provide a new steady source of income for farmers and other landowners while increasing access to solar power for people who can't pursue a solar project on their own.

For Lisa Lewis, a local solar energy advocate, community solar represents a unique opportunity to fulfill a dream of powering her home with solar energy.

"My home, like half of all homes in Pennsylvania, doesn't have the right size roof with good sun exposure to make traditional rooftop solar feasible," the Greene County resident said. "With community solar, I would be able to overcome those obstacles and would get the opportunity to achieve energy independence by generating my energy locally."

Lewis, who lives in a rural part of Southwestern Pennsylvania, also believes that community solar would provide an economic boost

for nearby sheep farms because solar panels can be placed on grazing fields.

And community solar projects can be sited on land formerly used for coal mining that is unsuitable for further development or farming.

Lewis, who hasn't been involved in advocacy since the 1970s, recently met her state representative, Pam Snyder, to advocate for passage of HB531, legislation designed to remove regulatory red tape that has been preventing the industry from operating in Pennsylvania.



Nationwide, 20 states already have community solar installations in place.

"I was nervous at first, but Rep. Snyder listened carefully to me and asked good questions," Lewis said. "She seemed particularly interested in the large number of homes in Pennsylvania that simply aren't suitable for solar — and how community solar represents increased energy choice for those families. I was so happy to see that she signed up as a sponsor of the bill shortly after our meeting."

For Henry McKay, who serves as Pennsylvania program director for Solar United Neighbors, a national non-profit organization dedicated to building a grassroots movement that empowers supporters of solar power, Lewis and other Pennsylvania energy

consumers represent the most compelling argument for advancing community solar legislation in Harrisburg.

“Anyone who has an electric bill can benefit from community solar,” said McKay. “This is the way to create real energy independence. This is a way for customers to take control of where their energy is coming from.”

McKay says that Lewis is just one of the many volunteers from across the commonwealth who are powering the campaign for community solar.

“It’s a unique and exciting opportunity for rural Pennsylvania, especially for farmers,” said McKay, who argued that community solar is the next logical step that would allow the commonwealth to fully reap the benefits of energy deregulation.

As for Lewis, she walked away from her interaction with Rep. Snyder energized and ready to further promote community solar. She’s trying to schedule meetings with other lawmakers and solar officials and has also been volunteering at community events to promote solar energy choices.

“Community solar has such obvious benefits for farmers, small businesses and people like me, I don’t see how anyone could say no to giving us the choice,” she said.