

# IBEW LOCAL 292



## SF 2688 Community Solar Garden Modification Senate Energy March 22, 2023

Thank you, Chair Frentz and members of the Senate Energy Committee. for allowing us to submit this testimony in support of SF 2688 as amended, the bill that will provide modifications to the Community Solar Garden plan.

My name is Andy Snope, I am the Legislative Director for IBEW Local 292. We represent 5000 electrical workers in our jurisdiction, as well as today I am speaking on behalf of the 14,000 IBEW workers who work throughout the state of Minnesota in the electrical industry. We are here today to speak in support of House File 2688 as amended.

Solar is what members of the IBEW do. Solar installation is electrical work. The IBEW with our contractor partners have been providing training for solar installations for many years without using taxpayer dollars. We train workers through our apprenticeship and continuing education programs that are completely industry funded through a joint funding effort from employees and employers.

Community Solar Garden modification has been a legislative topic for years. We believe that the modifications in this bill will help build a fairer and more equitable program. The Community Solar Garden program has been in need of increased labor standards. We see the addition of stronger worker standards in the program as a much needed reform to this program. The IBEW and the contractors we work for have formed strong partnerships with some of the most reputable solar developers, this has provided work for our members in the solar industry, and we are very appreciative of that. Unfortunately, not all solar developers are created equal and some of built their profits from the Community Solar Garden program on the backs of the workers they have employed.

The 2013 legislative session was the year that the State Legislature began a stronger focus on renewable energy and carbon reduction, enacting legislation to promote and incentivize the development of alternative, moving from legacy energy sources. Thus, the Community Solar Garden program was developed. More Solar and Wind, less coal and natural gas. Well-paying and great benefited jobs began to disappear as legacy power plants began to shut down. While the IBEW's well trained and diverse construction workforce evolved through this planning phase and are always able to meet the challenge of changing industries, we also so a lot of job loss suffered by our brothers and sisters in the legacy power producing industry.

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While we watched those in our industry lose their jobs, more frustration came for workers in the electrical construction industry when, driven by incentives created by the Community Solar Garden program; out of state renewable energy developers flooded the state of Minnesota in search of high profits. This resulted in a race to the bottom for wages and benefits in the renewable energy market. The contractors we work for, found it difficult to compete. Some of these, less than reputable, out of state developers were, able to dominate the industry by paying low wages and benefits that they paid traveling workers from other economic markets around the country. These workers and developers took these investments and left the state of Minnesota's economy to spend their money elsewhere. Some of these developers paid well below are labor wage and benefit standards as well as skirted electrical installation standards, licensing, inspection and supervision ratios in Minnesota State Statute.

Just in the last few years, we have been able to draw more attention to this issue, we have worked with the Department of Labor and Industry, the Department of Commerce, the MN PUC and legislators to recognize; local hiring, apprenticeship training and legacy plant job loss that has shifted though our industry. Further providing additional modifications and reforms to the Community Solar Garden Plan by providing stronger worker standards will help to make this program work better for more Minnesotans and the workers who are building our renewable development investments. These requirements around solar in the renewable energy industry is just another piece of the puzzle to promote great careers and a strong economy when we promote renewable energy.

Please support SF 2688 as amended. Please support good public policy around jobs. Please help keep local investments local and help spur the States economy.

Thank you for your time today, I am always available to answer any questions.

*Andy Snope*

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