

Dear Senators,

Northfield Area Community Solar (NACS), a nonprofit “organized exclusively for the promotion of environmental sustainability and social justice in the Northfield, Minnesota area and beyond,” strongly supports the Community Solar Garden bill SF 2688. It will make it possible for more entities to subscribe to community solar than currently can by removing the adjacent counties restriction and allowing more flexibility in the types of gardens that can be built through the increase in maximum size permitted and the addition of the public access option.

NACS came into being just after the initial Community Solar Garden legislation passed, when we saw this as a way at the local level to fight climate change. We have helped locate sites for gardens built in our area, and have helped with the writing and passage of local ordinances to make gardens possible here, augmenting and diversifying incomes of area farmers. Most of our work has involved growing subscribers. In doing this, we have raised interest, understanding and support for solar energy in general just as the program and we originally sought to do. The Community Solar Garden program has had remarkable success in jump-starting awareness and interest in solar energy in Minnesota.

Northfield and Rice County are nearing the limit of feasible community solar sites. When First United Church of Christ in Northfield asked us last week about Community Solar Garden subscriptions, we learned that the developer we have long worked with, Novel Energy Systems, won't have any new gardens in Rice or an adjacent county for at least a year. It does have gardens in the works in other Xcel Energy service territories. The church should be able to subscribe to one of those. Just this week, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change upped the urgency of acting faster than states and nations in the developed world have done to avoid catastrophic outcomes due to climate change. Improving the Community Solar Garden program through SF 2688 would be such an action.

Given the state's new, admirable goal of 2030 for all electricity to be carbon free, and 2040 for all energy to be carbon free, arbitrary restrictions on the location of gardens are anachronistic. The rule never successfully served its wonderful purpose of connecting people in a community to the source of its electrical power. The rule only hampers access to a form of solar energy at a time Minnesota can ill afford that. Please remove this hurdle and improve the Community Solar Garden program by moving SF 2688 forward.

Northfield Area Community Solar: Mary Jo Cristofaro, Executive Director; Erica Zweifel, Vice-Chair; Carla Hansen, Treasurer; and Matt Rohn, Secretary