

Testimony of

Robert Hazen

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Before the

Michigan House Energy Committee

on

HB4715 and HB4716

SUPPORT

October 27, 2021

Chairperson Bellino and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 4715 and House Bill 4716. As a citizen of the Village of L'Anse and a member of the Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, I can attest to the benefits that community solar has for residents of the Village of L'Anse and in what ways it will benefit tribal communities.

Some ratepayers across the Upper Peninsula—especially those in UPPCO territory—pay around twenty-five cents per kilowatt hour, which is 67% higher than the Michigan average. To offset these high rates that customers face, community solar is the solution forward. The Village of L'Anse is an anomaly in the Upper Peninsula in that the village was the last community solar project implemented in the state, and it has been successful. The Village of L'Anse with the help of WPPI Energy installed 340 solar panels which produce 110 kilowatts of power, of which 250 panels were set aside for twenty-five low-to-moderate income subscribers. Those twenty-five subscribers were able to take advantage of the Low-to-Moderate Income Access Program which allows customers to purchase shares or panels in a community solar array and receive credits on their monthly bill for the power these panels produce for twenty-five years. Residents who participated in the Low-to-Moderate Income Access Program saw savings of \$20 to \$30 on their monthly utility bills. The benefits of this program encourage customers to be energy efficient; it reduces greenhouse gas emissions; and it lowers the number of late payments and accounts in delinquency.

Furthermore, community solar and the Low-to-Moderate Income Access Program meant that residents had more money in their pockets to spend in other areas of need like their own healthcare. There is always a worry that our citizens—especially our elderly—do not have the financial means to afford their monthly expenses, forcing them to prioritize electricity over their own healthcare expenses or food or other necessities. Utility companies like UPPCO have failed to do enough to prevent their customers from suffering, especially given that the western Upper Peninsula is economically impoverished. However, profit over customer; profit over environment; and profit over reason has been what drives UPPCO to get away with charging around twenty-five cents per kilowatt hour when the national average

is around thirteen cents per kilowatt hour. This is wrong, but they are able to continue to hide behind profits and influence votes, and that ends today.

Whether or not public utilities are willing to work alongside customers and legislators to develop a solution, I can assure you that the Indigenous community—who has long been good stewards of the land and environment—are willing to use their autonomy to fight for energy democracy and do whatever it takes to curb the climate crisis. Now is the time to act—not only for your constituents, but against corporate interests—to pass community solar enabling policy. In doing so, we give our consumers the freedom to choose how they get their energy, the ability to lower their utility bills, and to build a more sustainable future.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Hazen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

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