

Q&A Summary of House Bill 4185

H4185 Is NOT A Net Meter Compromise, and NEEDs To Be Re-Written!

- It is being sold as the only way to avert a solar net cap crisis. In reality, the bill goes far beyond Net Metering reform and instead is a radical change that guts existing Massachusetts solar policy and hands utilities full control of our solar future from here forward.

It is no secret that the utilities have embarked on a nation-wide campaign to roll back or completely eliminate renewable energy programs. Coordinated attacks have been and are being launched against programs in many states. Rather than embracing the future, the utilities tenaciously fight to continue the outmoded business-as-usual scenario and maintain their cost-plus-fixed-fee monopoly. Whatever happened to their crusade only a few years back where the utilities were singing the praises of competition as they pressed for deregulation?

What was the Legislative Process

- HB 4185 was released in the first week of June 2014. It was drafted in secret by two utilities, NU and NGRID, and two select out-of-state utility sponsored solar organizations, SEIA and NECEC, and is being railroaded through the legislature.
- It was written by the utilities and large national solar developers to benefit their own special interests.
- Solar owners, the local solar industry, academic experts on renewables and the environmental community have all been excluded from the closed-door discussions on this bill even as it makes its way through the legislature.

What Will Be The Substantive Impacts To Solar Owners And Industry

- **Removes Net Meter Caps:** At least until the Governor's goal of 1600 MW (also made a statute) is achieved. In reality, it places many new limits on the solar that, together, will sharply reduce the progress of renewables.
- **Changes Virtual Net Metering:** This bill would slash the Virtual Net Metering rate nearly in half, which basically eliminates the viability of true community-shared solar now just getting established and the sharing of a solar PV system production between accounts as allowed under the Green Community Act.
- **Discourages Solar PV Production:** This bill would limit the size or capacity to generate solar electricity onsite to a maximum of 100% of the customer's 3-year electrical demand with the onus on the customer to prove any future electrical needs.
- **Eliminates SREC Program:** For almost two years the DOER developed the SREC2 program through exhaustive study and public hearings, and it was implemented on April 26, 2014. This bill would replace a known open market Solar Renewable Energy Credits (SREC) program that serves all with an unknown, yet-to-be-determined, declining block incentive managed by individual utilities each in their own style as ordered through a lengthy and arcane DPU tariff process and then subject to constant amendment at utilities' requests forever.
- **New Minimum Bill Requirement:** Born straight from the ALEC public relations playbook, this fee on *everyone's* monthly bill is designed to scapegoat solar energy as the reason that ratepayers pay extra on their electric bill, and punishes the solar "free-loaders" by requiring anyone who zeros out their bill with solar energy to also help pay this undue burden with a minimum fee on their bill. ALEC has shown in other states that this PR tactic serves two goals; 1) it turns the ratepayers against renewable energy believing it is unfairly subsidized (fact: fossil fuels get 73 government subsidies for every 1 for renewables), 2) it discourages new solar investment, especially residential and small business.

The fact is that solar PV excess production is already paid for twice, once when it is sold by utilities to the PV owner neighbors, and second via the "Net Recovery Fee" on everyone's bill, so this third attempt at payment is going to far. When it comes to added cost to ratepayers, it is actually the billing of "Energy Efficiency Programs" (MassSave) that is the far greater portion, more than 20x the solar recovery fee.

What Would A Real Net Meter Compromise Bill Be:

The crisis right now is just increasing Net Metering capacity for all utilities, therefore we propose the language of H4185 be amended to focus on this issue alone, and set a time table to discuss the future of solar policy within a reasonable time frame that allows all parties and stakeholders input (similar to original bills S2019/H3901).

- Double the solar net metering cap to 12%
- Preserve 32 years of progressive solar policy achievements in Massachusetts
- Schedule an open transparent process to improve solar policy within the next two years

For all of these reasons, we urge you to actively oppose this so-called "compromise bill" HB 4185 both with your own vote and more importantly as a leader and educator among your colleagues in the Statehouse.

Please support an amended bill that extends the net metering cap and calls for a broad review of the issues and promotes fair guidelines for energy generated by the sun .

Thank you for your attention and concern about our energy and climate future.

Sincerely,

MASOA Founders

