

Written Testimony; People's Hearing on Climate Change

My name is Elowyn Corby, and I am the Mid-Atlantic Regional Director for Vote Solar, a national nonprofit that fights for a 100% clean energy transition that puts the interests, health and well-being of people at its center. I lead our campaign work in Pennsylvania, and have been lucky enough to call Philadelphia home for the last 14 years.

Like many others testifying today, my family story is intimately tied to the evolution of Pennsylvania's energy economy. Many generations ago, the Corbys were coal miners in England, who traveled to Luzerne County – not far from here – in search of economic opportunity. That opportunity revolved around mining the raw energy that helped to fuel the industrial revolution.

You'll hear similar stories echoed in every coal town across the state, and see the evidence of them etched into the sides of the mountains.

And while my ancestors didn't have a choice about what energy future they were contributing to, how the benefits would be distributed, or what the impact would be on the earth and the air we breathe, we do. The choices they were never given are part of why I can feel confident standing here today to advocate for a new approach that breaks with the extractive industries of the past – and instead helps chart a course for a cleaner, more fair clean energy future.

I don't need to tell you that Pennsylvania is already seeing hotter and drier summers and more extreme weather as our climate destabilizes. We're seeing higher energy bills as our grid strains to keep us cool in the summer and warm in the winter. We're seeing increased incidence of heat-related medical issues, and of insect-borne diseases that accelerate with warmer temperatures.

We're here because we know about the problems. So instead, I want to talk about the solution: a rapid and equitable transition to clean energy is the cornerstone to solving the climate crisis and realizing a more just society.

Luckily, the numbers are on our side: clean energy is growing rapidly and is easily the cheapest energy being added to the grid – far less expensive than coal or fracked gas.

Rapid deployment of renewable energy, with an emphasis on local solar, storage, and distributed generation – especially in overburdened communities – saves money, creates jobs, and helps local communities by mitigating the health and environmental impacts of extractive industries.

The transition to a clean energy economy is not only a critical step toward protecting our planet against escalating climate change, but is also an unprecedented opportunity to make the *choice* to reshape our legacy energy system to serve people instead of profits. As we transition from dirty, fossil-fueled generation to clean and renewable energy, we can do so in a way that prioritizes a just transition.

Historically, decisions made about how our energy is generated and consumed have excluded the people most impacted. Solar's unique ability to shift power, literally and figuratively, can lower costs of living, create local jobs, reduce health-harming pollution, and build a brighter, more resilient future for generations to come – all while putting people first. We have an opportunity and a mandate to demand a transition to 100% clean energy, and to do it quickly.

In Pennsylvania, we're also ready to double-down by unleashing community solar: a critical tool to expand access to clean energy that's already operational in 22 states and D.C., but that our legislature has yet to authorize. Community solar lets multiple people share the benefits of a larger solar array, without needing to install solar panels on their own homes.

Since community solar projects can be built off-site, such as on community centers, vacant lots, or landfills, they avoid the access barriers posed by rooftop solar. And since solar energy itself is so affordable once installed, a good community solar program guarantees that all subscribers save money on their utility bills, while targeting benefits to those who need them the most. Community solar can also provide much needed economic benefits to frontline communities through wealth-building and community ownership, workforce development, and family-sustaining jobs.

Community solar is just one of the critical – and genuinely exciting – tools that we can choose for our state. We can – and should – also increase our state's alternative energy portfolio standard, modernize our grid, increase deployment of energy storage and efficiency, and make sure all these advancements are tailored to benefit communities that have always felt the weight of the energy system on their shoulders, but have never seen their fair share of the benefits.

A 100% clean energy system is now an achievable reality — thanks to technological advances in renewable energy, solar's low-cost momentum and its overwhelming support from people across the country, as well as right here at home.

We look forward to working with community members, leaders and advocates – many of whom are in this room – to make the choice, together as a state, to advance a truly equitable clean energy transition.