

To: The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ)
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Committee on Energy and Commerce

From: The Reverend Leo Woodberry, Executive Director
Justice First
Florence, SC

RE: Questions for The Reverend Leo Woodberry Testimony
At the “Time for Action: Addressing the Environmental and Economic Effects of Climate Change”

Date: May 1, 2019

Question 1: What role should community-based energy solutions (such as community solar) play in addressing climate change at the local level?

Answer: Community-based climate change solutions will vary from location to location, depending on conditions and situations. Of course, to mitigate carbon and greenhouse gas emissions, we need to move as rapidly as possible towards generating clean renewable energy, such as solar. Mitigation may also include stopping large scale logging along rivers and waterways, since our forests and trees are our natural defenses against weather-related flooding. In rural areas, resilience may include cleaning out drainage ditches and urban areas, improving and expanding infrastructure for storm water drainage and sewers. In both rural and urban area, we may want to look at bioswells and retention ponds, as both resilience and adaptation solutions. Another increasing concern is to elevate homes throughout the country that are located in expanding and increasing floodplains. Finally, federal subsidies and tax credits for energy efficiency and demand side management devices (such as: programmable thermostats and timers for water heaters) will lower energy costs for utilities, electric co-ops, and customers.

Question 1a: What are some of the benefits that community solar offers the customers it serves?

Answer: The challenges facing many residential customers when it comes to solar generated energy, are as follows: (1) homes that are facing in the wrong direction. (2) Homes that are overshadowed by trees and vegetation. (3) Homes that have old roofs or trailer homes with roof structures that are not strong enough. (4) Residents who live in apartment complexes, whose landlords cannot afford to install solar panels.

The benefits of community shared solar is that, all of the aforementioned customers residing in homes described above, can benefit from solar energy generated from community shared solar farms. They do not have to purchase rooftop systems that may run as high as \$30-50,000 and are out of the financial reach of many Americans. Another benefit is that community shared solar

provides electricity for low-income customers whose income tax situation will not allow them to benefit from federal and state tax credits.

Question 1b: Please share some examples of where community solar has been most successful.

Answer: A good example of a community shared solar project is provided by Duke Energy in Dillon County, SC. The utility in partnership with the Whitney M. Slater Foundation, Kingdom Living Temple, and New Alpha Community Development Corporation, constructed a solar farm in the middle of a soybean farm that serves 1,200 households. The solar farm is located in a predominately low-income, rural community. Low-income individuals had their one time \$250 connection fee waived for 300 residential customers. The utility also provided 1,500 free energy efficiency upgrades. This will minimize the replication of models of energy inefficiency and injustice. Such a model would have customers heating and cooling the outdoors, spending a disproportionate amount of their income on energy, and costing the utility additional expenses to disconnect and reconnect customers. This inclusive process of involving the community with the planning and implementation of community shared solar has been praised and the South Carolina Solar Council will be awarding the community-based organizations with an innovative solar award this week.

Question 1c: What obstacles have you encountered in developing community solar and how can the federal government help support community-based solutions?

Answer: We have encountered several obstacles in the two years preceding the community shared solar farm, constructed in Dillon, SC. The obstacles included: a cap and sunset provision on net metering and solar generation. The need for subsidies or grants for utilities and co-ops, who are reluctant to construct small scale solar projects because of the length of time it takes for them to get a return on their investment. There is a need for grants that can be awarded to nonprofit community-based organizations, who can meet the resilience, mitigation, and adaptation needs of communities impacted by climate change and to construct small scale solar projects for subdivisions, mobile home parks, and church and school parking lots. These grants and other forms of federal assistance can also provide jobs in rural and low-income urban communities that are desperately in need of new engines of economic development.