

Philly Brotherhood Pushes To Get Solar Job Growth Back on Track

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Today the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 98 gathered with city officials and solar business leaders to urge Pennsylvania lawmakers to save solar power investment and job opportunities in the state.

In recent years, Pennsylvania was one of the nation’s fastest growing solar economies. There are now more than 6,000 solar electric systems installed in the Commonwealth. Those installations have supported thousands of high-quality local jobs, but they also equate to over three times more solar power than state law requires. With solar supply now far outpacing demand, new project installations are slowing and the once-thriving Pennsylvania solar job engine is grinding to a halt. A solution exists in Harrisburg: HB 1580 would increase the state’s solar goals for the next three years, making use of an industry ready to build more solar power today and making tomorrow’s aggressive solar goals more achievable.

IBEW Local 98 Business Manager John J. Dougherty said, "Solar jobs are good, local jobs. Through the recession economy, this new industry provided a rare bright spot of job growth right here in Philadelphia, especially for the hard-hit construction sector. Without leadership from Harrisburg on HB 1580, those solar jobs will be put on hold until 2014. Pennsylvania can't afford that kind of inaction." Local 98 members work in the electrical, telecommunications and broadcast industries in Philadelphia and the surrounding counties.

Solar creates more jobs per megawatt than any other energy technology. These are high quality jobs across a broad range of education requirements, salary levels and fields. The majority (approximately 75%) are related to system development and installation, representing local jobs that are virtually non-outsourcable. Fields include engineering, construction, sales, marketing, finance and legal services. The remaining 25% is related to manufacturing. According to the Solar Foundation's 2011 Solar Jobs Census, Pennsylvania ranks fourth in the nation for solar-related jobs with nearly 5,000 people employed at 750 businesses.

“HB 1580 is critical to the growing solar industry in Philadelphia,” said Mayor Michael A. Nutter. “Federal and state incentives to promote this industry are disappearing in the recession and the market for solar credits has collapsed. Without encouragement, Pennsylvania’s solar industry, which in recent years has transformed the Commonwealth into one of the nation’s leading solar markets, is in danger of disappearing. This is costing Pennsylvania good jobs and millions in investments.”

"Pennsylvanians have clearly demonstrated that they want solar energy - and lots of it. Hundreds of solar companies like mine are ready to put our thousands of employees to work meeting that demand throughout the state. The only thing standing between us and a thriving solar economy is the passage of HB 1580. I want to bring home the 50 Philadelphia based employees who we transferred to other states or recently laid off due to the solar market crash," said Andrew Kleeman, Senior Vice President of Mercury Solar Systems. The company is one of the largest solar installation businesses on the East Coast and, until recently, employed 50 in the Commonwealth.

"HB 1580 would drive Pennsylvania solar development at a time when global costs are dramatically declining, the U.S. industry is surging, and Pennsylvania needs new economic opportunities. And perhaps most importantly, it would break the state's boom-bust solar cycle and put it on a stable, long-term growth path," said PASEIA President Ron Celentano, representing over 80 solar manufacturers, developers, installers, and other solar professionals that do business in Pennsylvania.

"With a diverse solar industry already employing thousands of Pennsylvanians, now is the time to keep the foot on the throttle to get solar back on track. HB 1580 would ensure that the Commonwealth can sustain a stable market for continued solar growth over the coming years and beyond," said Peter Olmsted, Director of Mid-Atlantic Policy for the Vote Solar Initiative.

By 2021, 8 percent of Pennsylvania’s energy must come from renewable sources with one half of a percent coming from solar. HB 1580 (Ross-R, Chester County) would increase the near-term annual solar requirements along the path to that same long-term target. This small change would provide reliable investment opportunities for Pennsylvania solar customers and protect the state's solar job growth. 109 State Representatives and 18 State Senators have signed on in support of the bi-partisan policy. HB 1580 is also supported by a diverse group of trade, industry, public health and environmental organizations. Lawmakers have until the end of June to pass HB 1580 in order for this to help the solar industry.