



California Takes Steps to Expand Solar Opportunities For Low-Income and Environmental Justice Communities

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Solar industry, renewable energy and environmental justice organizations and advocates applauded a decision by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) that will increase opportunities for low-income households to go solar, lower their utility bills, and participate in the state's growing clean energy economy. Following a multi-year process prompted by Assembly Bill (AB) 327, the Commission approved a 12-year solar rebate program for low-income homeowners living in disadvantaged communities that expands on California's long-standing Single-Family Affordable Solar Homes (SASH) program. The decision was proposed by Commissioner Martha Guzman Aceves.

"California has been a leader nationally in providing solar access to families in disadvantaged communities," said Elise Hunter, Policy and Regulatory Director at GRID Alternatives. "We are thrilled to see the commission's continued efforts to expand access and ensure that our transition to clean energy includes all our communities."

"Today's decision is an important step toward affordable, clean energy for all," said Madeline Stano, Energy Equity Legal Counsel at The Greenlining Institute. "We look forward to continuing to work with the Commission and all parties on delivering equitable, community-led clean energy policy solutions to low-income disadvantaged community residents."

AB 327, passed in 2013, included a requirement for the CPUC to develop programs to increase adoption of renewable generation among residential customers in disadvantaged communities. The new rebate program, Disadvantaged Communities - Single Family Affordable Solar Homes (DAC-SASH), builds on and provides long-term funding for the SASH program, which has reduced the cost of going solar for more than 7,000 households and provided over 100,000 hours of solar job training for individuals seeking employment since 2009.

"California's disadvantaged communities applaud the leadership of Commissioner Guzman Aceves and look forward to this decision ushering in a new day of clean energy access and lowering energy burdens for ratepayers most in need," said Ameer Raval, on behalf of the California Environmental Justice Alliance."

"Solar has and will continue to create sustainable jobs for low-income and typically underserved communities," said Eddie Ahn, Executive Director of Brightline Defense. "We're pleased that the Commission continues to prioritize inclusion of workforce development opportunities for marginalized and disadvantaged workers who hail from the same communities these programs are designed to serve."

In addition to adopting DAC-SASH, the Commission Order also makes modest improvements to the utilities' Green Tariff programs with the goal of helping low-income customers receive bill discounts through participation. The decision did not go as far as coalition members had hoped in creating community-based shared solar opportunities like

those that have been used successfully to increase low-income consumer access in Colorado and other states.

“Communities historically affected by local pollution may soon access clean energy at a discount that mostly comes from solar on a local community building.” says Subin DeVar, Community Renewable Energy Program Director at the Sustainable Economies Law Center. “This is a valuable new alternative until the state adopts a true community solar program based on virtual net metering, as fairness demands.”

“The Commission’s decision is an important step to make solar accessible to all Californians so that everyone can reap the economic and environmental benefits of this clean energy resource,” said Abigail Ross Hopper, President and CEO of the Solar Energy Industries Association. “While SEIA commends the Commission for making it easier for all families, regardless of income level to go solar, California has more to do to bring solar to renters and others who can’t put panels on their rooftop. We look forward to working with lawmakers and regulators to improve options for these communities.”

"Affordable solar energy has the power to improve health and well-being for everyone, particularly low-income families and communities of color that are on the frontlines of fossil impacts. We applaud the important steps that today's decision took to build on the success of the SASH program for single-family homeowners," said Sachu Constantine, regulatory managing director at Vote Solar. "California must now show the nation and the world that we are committed to building a clean energy economy for all by taking further steps to expand community solar options for renters and others who can't go solar on their own rooftops."

"Community-based solar can empower frontline communities" said Collin Tateishi, Policy Manager for the California Housing Partnership. "While this is a missed opportunity for local ownership and community self-determination, we hope that regulators will prioritize initiatives that unlock clean energy benefits for community organizations and low-income Californians."

"There are tangible benefits from today's decision to expand SASH, but we are concerned that many customers renting homes in disadvantaged communities are left without a clean energy option," said Brandon Smithwood, Policy Director for the Coalition for Community Solar Access. "We hope the Commission hears the concerns of low-income, environmental justice, and solar groups and revisits net metering next year to develop a robust community solar offering."

“California has taken a critical step to ensure underserved customers and communities can benefit from renewable energy energy,” said Sara Baldwin Auck, Regulatory Director of the Interstate Renewable Energy Council. “As these new programs roll out, we are eager to support ongoing efforts to refine and expand clean energy options for all people in California.”

Coalition members include Solar Energy Industries Association, Coalition for Community Solar Access, Vote Solar, GRID Alternatives, California Housing Partnership, California Environmental Justice Alliance, Brightline Defense, The Greenlining Institute, Interstate Renewable Energy Council and Sustainable Economies Law Center.

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