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Written Testimony of the Coalition for Community Solar Access
Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Environmental Conservation
Re: 2024-2025 Executive Budget

February 7, 2024

Dear Senator Krueger, Assemblymember Weinstein, and esteemed committee members,

The Coalition for Community Solar Access (CCSA) greatly appreciates this opportunity to provide written testimony on the State's FY 2025 Budget. CCSA is a national coalition of businesses and non-profits working to expand customer choice and access to solar for all American households and businesses through community solar. Our mission is to empower every American energy consumer with the option to choose local, clean, and affordable solar. We work with customers, utilities, local stakeholders, and policymakers to develop and implement policies and best practices that ensure community solar programs provide a win, win, win for all, starting with the customer.

New York has the nation's largest community solar market with over 2 GW of community solar projects installed and delivering meaningful electric bill savings to hundreds of thousands of customers across the state. Policymakers should take great pride in this achievement, as states across the country look to New York for best practices on creating a thriving community solar industry with its corresponding investment in local communities. Community solar has been a key part in New York's success in driving towards its 10 GW of distributed solar by 2030 goal, and is responsible for a significant portion of the State's progress towards 70% renewable energy by 2030. These projects, each sized up to 5 MW and typically occupying no more than 40 acres of land, can quickly and cost-effectively deploy to address the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act requirements, drive local economic development and good paying jobs, and help customers - particularly low income customers - address rising energy costs.

While the Executive Budget includes elements to support renewable energy deployment and energy affordability, it does not include any provisions that directly address the challenges that community solar and distributed generation developers currently face. However, there are legislative proposals filed in the current session that would institute needed changes to support the continued health of the most successful community solar market in the country.

One of the most significant obstacles to the timely and cost-effective development of local renewable energy in New York has been overly restrictive land use requirements and irrational solar moratoria. These local laws that cause serious impediments are often borne of a lack of understanding of the benefits and actual impacts of solar projects, and out of a misconception that the project will not deliver meaningful benefits to the host community. Unlike large scale renewable projects that are permitted through the state Office of Renewable Energy Siting



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(ORES), distributed generation projects do not currently have any other recourse for addressing siting and permitting disputes at the local level.

CCSA strongly supports **A.3579-A/S.8392**, legislation introduced by Assemblymember Fahy and Senator Cooney. This legislation would:

- Remove PILOT agreements entered into by renewable energy projects and local jurisdictions from the calculation of the property tax cap, so that PILOT agreements do not have a counterproductive impact on a municipalities' overall tax revenue;
- Create a state-level appeals process within ORES to ensure that projects that are denied permits at the local level have a fair recourse against unreasonable or overly restrictive local decisions; and
- Allocate funding to NYSERDA for education and outreach to communities to equip local decision makers to make informed solar siting and permitting decisions.

CCSA believes this is a fair and balanced approach to solar siting policy. It protects the right and autonomy of local communities to make land use decisions, but creates a backstop at the state level for extreme cases where municipalities have abused that authority. It provides incentives to communities to host projects by making sure that those communities can realize a financial benefit through PILOT payments, and provides the resources for local jurisdictions to be well informed about what they can expect with a community solar project. This proposal keeps "community" as a central focus to community solar, and in doing so, will improve the state's renewable energy economy and ensure renewable energy projects deliver tangible benefits to New Yorkers.

We thank you for your consideration, and for your leadership on clean energy issues. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions.

Sincerely,

/s/ Kate Daniel
Northeast Regional Director
Coalition for Community Solar Access