

**Evernorth testimony to House Energy & Digital Infrastructure  
April 10, 2025**

Evernorth is a nonprofit affordable housing developer working in Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine. We have developed over 7,000 units of affordable rental housing across the state of Vermont during our 35 year history. In our current portfolio we co-own more than 3,600 apartments across the state. Evernorth is a national leader in building energy efficient apartments and incorporating renewables into our buildings.

Evernorth and VHFA were members of the Act 179 study committee and I want to commend the PSD for their comprehensive process with the study committee, as well as a very well written report. As you may all understand, one of the reasons for the report as stated in statute was to propose comparable successor programs to group net-metering for connecting affordable housing developments because Act 179 also included a sunset for net-metering affordable housing on December 31, 2025.

**An equitable approach:**

For the last three years I have been convening an “Energy Justice in Housing Working Group” and I have included a description of that groups efforts in my handouts. The Act 179 discusses this concept of energy equity, and notes that our energy policy objectives need to include *both* least cost, sustainable, reliable electric service while also ensuring future programs prioritize delivering benefits to the most vulnerable Vermonters.

As acknowledged by the report, residential solar has not been equitably available to all income levels and rather, the benefit of solar has largely gone to higher income single family homeowners. Because Act 179 did not sunset net metering for single family homes, the much discussed cost shift for net metering remains in place for single family homeowners. And this category typically represents higher income than rental households. Comparatively, the average median income for renters in affordable rental housing is \$17,000.

But we have a five-year opportunity to equitably deliver the benefit of solar to lower income Vermonters through the pending Solar For All program. As I think you have heard, the PSD plan for S4A includes allocating \$22.3M of the dollars to VHFA, in what is affectionately called the MASH program, and targeted to affordable MF housing.

So as a developer and owner of affordable rental housing, where there has essentially been no energy funds available to add solar to our projects, we will finally have access to meaningful incentives for solar.

But at the same time these funds are becoming available, the ability to construct off-site net metered systems, connected to our affordable housing, will likely no longer be an option due to the sunset of December 31, 2025. So what we are seeking is an extension of that sunset, while

the Department, the Legislature and the PUC work on a more comprehensive successor program such as the RE4C program under discussion.

Why is this important? I want to share with you a brief example of why we are looking for this extension of the sunset.

**Bay Ridge Apartments:**

In partnership with Champlain Housing Trust, 68 affordable apartments plus 26 shared equity homes located in Shelburne.

For the MF housing, we first looked to cover as much of the roof as possible with solar panels. As you can see from our rooftop solar plan, the rooftop of MF housing can be a busy place. When using ASHPs, it is the best location for the condensers. So based on that rooftop plan, we could only offset about 15% of the buildings' electric load.

Fortunately, with help from a grant from VLITE, we were able to add an off-site 150kW system located just across the road from our housing. By adding off-site solar, we are now able to offset 51% of the electric load.

This is an example of what we would like to repeat with the Solar For All program, but it does require the ability to have off-site solar.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS:**

The report provides a comprehensive overview of the issues related to net metering within the Vermont energy policy framework. The recommendations for a more comprehensive successor program such as suggested in the RE4C approach will likely require additional time and legislative/PUC work to implement. In this time of transition, Evernorth is advocating for an extension of the December 31, 2025 sunset found in Act 179 for affordable MF housing and manufactured housing communities.

Proposed legislative language:

30 V.S.A. Sec 8002 (16)(D)(ii) *for a system that files a complete application for a certificate of public good after December 31, 2025 2029, if the system serves a if the system serves a multifamily building containing qualified rental units serving low-income tenants, as defined under 32 V.S.A. § 5404a(a)(6), generates energy that will be used on the same parcel as, or a parcel adjacent to, the parcel where the plant is located;"*

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