

**Testimony - Solar for All in Vermont**  
**Vermont House Committee on Energy and Digital Resources**  
**Thursday, March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to join you today. My name is Ethan Hinch, and I am Senator Sanders' Climate Policy Advisor.

First, on behalf of Senator Sanders, I want to thank you for your focus on the Solar for All program.

It is no great secret that climate change is an existential threat to the entire planet. Unless we transform our energy system away from fossil fuels to sustainable energy and energy efficiency, the planet we are leaving our kids and grandkids will become increasingly uninhabitable.

That is why Senator Sanders has worked for a number of years on a rooftop and residential solar program to cut carbon emissions, reduce working families' electric bills, and create many thousands of good paying jobs. This program started as the bipartisan *10 Million Solar Roofs Act*, which Senator Sanders introduced in 2011. It evolved into an unprecedented \$7 billion in funding for the EPA's Solar for All program, which Senator Sanders successfully fought to include in the Inflation Reduction Act. This \$7 billion was included in the larger \$27 billion "Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund", which also includes \$20 billion for an EPA "green bank" program.

With this \$7 billion, the EPA is providing 60 grants to states, territories, tribal governments, municipalities, and nonprofits across the country to develop long-lasting solar programs that enable low-income and disadvantaged communities to install rooftop and community-based solar. These recipients include 49 state-level awards, six awards to tribes, and five awards to nonprofits for work that will cover multiple states. The EPA selected these recipients through a competitive grant process that awarded \$62.45 million to the Vermont Department of Public Service – the most per-capita funding of any state.

Senator Sanders announced these awards alongside President Biden and former EPA Administrator Michael Regan at the Prince William Forest Park on Earth Day 2024, almost one year ago. Days later, the Senator met with Governor Scott and then-Commissioner Tierney to discuss how to implement the program as quickly as possible and make Vermont a Solar for All model for other states. Throughout the rest of 2024, Senator Sanders worked hard to move the state to quick action on this important program. Frankly, he was disappointed and frustrated by the Department leadership's lack of progress on planning and implementing the program. Solar for All panels could be on Vermonters' rooftops right now if action had been taken. Unfortunately, they are not.

Since the new year, the Senator has been encouraged by Public Service Commissioner Kerrick Johnson's approach to moving the program forward. Senator Sanders has been very clear: Commissioner Johnson and the Department's smart and capable staff must dedicate the

necessary time and resources to planning and implementing Vermont's Solar for All program as quickly as possible. Urgency is critical because time is of the essence.

President Trump has made dangerous and unconstitutional moves towards authoritarianism, including illegally "freezing" the Solar for All program for several weeks in January and February. While Solar for All funding was unfrozen around February 20th, the EPA's Office of Inspector General recently announced it will audit Solar for All to determine "the status of funds, top recipients, and potential risks and impacts" of the program. EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin has been quick to allege waste, fraud, and abuse across a number of EPA grant programs, and Senator Sanders remains concerned that the EPA will try to illegally terminate Vermont's Solar for All grant. If that happens, quick action by Vermont Attorney General Charity Clark will be crucial in blocking the Trump administration from illegally repurposing or rescinding this funding. However, the best way to protect Vermont's Solar for All program is to begin installing solar panels and saving working families money on their electric bills.

Solar for All is a transformational program. It's going to create more than \$8.7 billion in national electric bill savings over the lifetime of the program's solar panels. It's going to reduce emissions equivalent to taking more than 7 million cars off the road. It's going to strengthen the resiliency of our electric grid. It's going to help working families break free from the power company by owning their electricity generation. And it's going to create a very clear reminder – right on Vermonters' rooftops – that renewable energy is the cheapest form of new energy generation. Period.

Senator Sanders is committed to working with the Public Service Department and the Vermont Legislature to move this program forward as quickly as possible to expand residential solar, lower the cost of Vermont electric bills, and combat the existential threat of climate change.