

February 10, 2021
Minnesota House Climate and Energy Finance and Policy Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Union of Concerned Scientists Testimony on Clean Energy First Act (H.F. 10) by Meghan Hassett, Midwest Clean Energy Advocate

Dear Chair Long and the House Climate and Energy Committee,

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) is the nation's leading science-based nonprofit organization with more than 500,000 supporters, including 6,800 in Minnesota. UCS has long advocated for transitioning our energy system away from fossil fuels like coal and natural gas that produce global warming emissions and other harmful pollutants to clean, renewable energy sources like wind and solar. We would like to thank Representative Stephenson for aiming to prioritize clean, renewable, carbon-free energy for Minnesotans, and are particularly grateful for his leadership in focusing on local clean energy jobs for workers and local benefits for communities. We appreciate the willingness of the bill author to make amendments that addressed many of our concerns with the bill.

Minnesota already has the tools we need to prioritize renewable energy: lower costs of wind, solar, efficiency, and storage; emission reduction targets; and a Public Utilities Commission (PUC) with the power to hold utilities accountable in assisting the state in reducing emissions and evaluate utility resource plans and energy investments based on the public interest. We appreciate Rep. Stephenson bringing forward the Clean Energy First Act to make Minnesota's renewable energy preference even stronger, especially by uplifting environmental costs and local job creation and excluding solid waste incineration. UCS wants to be clear that there is nothing stopping the Legislature from committing to a 100 percent carbon-free energy future and investing heavily in wind, solar, efficiency and storage and demand response, and we look forward to continued work with the Committee on policies that concretely bring an equitable, clean energy future into focus for all Minnesotans.

Minnesota can and must shift to an equitable clean energy future with reduced [energy burdens](#), net-zero emissions, and increased economic opportunities. This transition must ensure that communities facing coal plant closures, climate impacts, and fossil fuel pollution are prioritized. The most cost-effective ways to accelerate clean energy development are strong, enforceable renewable energy and carbon-free energy standards; strong, enforceable emission reduction targets; and funding for programs that support a just and equitable clean energy transition, create local clean energy job opportunities, and enable the state to meet ambitious emission reductions and renewable energy targets. We recommend the Committee prioritize these kinds of solutions to accelerate Minnesota's clean energy transition. UCS has been a leading advocate for these kinds of renewable and low-carbon standards at the state and federal levels for more than 20 years, including important benefits such as

workforce development, reducing energy costs for consumers, and mitigating impacts of fossil fuel use such as poor [air quality](#) and climate change.

Minnesotans are facing a climate crisis in addition to an economic and public health crisis, which has exposed racial injustices and socioeconomic disparities. Despite being one of the first states to take significant climate action with the Next Generation Energy Act, Minnesota has fallen behind on its emission reduction goals, and other states have leapfrogged the Minnesota renewable energy standards. In recent years, 10 states plus D.C. and Puerto Rico have adopted renewable electricity standards greater than 50 percent, and at least 10 states have adopted renewable or carbon-free electricity requirements or goals reaching 100 percent between 2040 and 2050.

Accelerating renewable energy development in the state provides exciting economic and health benefits, both of which are sorely needed as Minnesotans face the ongoing public health and economic crisis of COVID-19, in addition to climate. Increasing renewables is affordable for Minnesota and energy consumers. The cost of renewable energy and energy storage has fallen dramatically, with [solar costs plummeting more than 80 percent over the past decade](#), and continued cost reductions are expected. Investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy can lower consumer energy bills and improve local [air quality](#), reducing the [energy burden](#) for low-income customers as well as the pollution burden for environmental justice communities.

The economics are clear –the [falling costs of renewable energy](#) make [wind and solar the most cost-effective electricity sources](#) in Minnesota today, combined with energy efficiency, which lowers consumer electricity bills. Soon, it will be more expensive to operate existing fossil fuel power plants than it will be to build new solar or wind farms. Prioritizing renewable energy over fossil fuels is smart for the state, its workers, and its ratepayers.

Minnesota’s utility regulators already have the power under current statute to deny a new proposed fossil fuel resource unless the utility proposing it demonstrates that a renewable energy facility is not in the public interest. And though Minnesota’s emission reduction targets are lagging behind current climate science, Minnesota’s utility regulators also have the power to hold utilities accountable to helping the state lower emissions. **Increased direction and urgency from the Legislature to drive toward 100 percent carbon-free electricity by 2040 would help ensure the PUC prioritizes renewable energy over fossil fuels.**