

CLEAR Energy Coalition

April 2, 2024

RE: Comments on HF 5097 (Acomb)

Dear Chair Acomb and members of the Climate and Energy Finance and Policy Committee:

We are writing in support of and to offer suggested improvements to House File 5097 which would direct the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) to develop a cost-sharing process for distribution system upgrades and create an interconnection ombudsperson.

The CLEAR Energy Coalition aims to build an equitable and democratic energy future by advancing policies that bring affordable, local clean energy to all Minnesotans.

Currently, excessive delays and costs and opaque decision making in the interconnection process keep local clean energy — and its benefits — from reaching more Minnesotans, particularly in low-income and historically marginalized communities. Fixing these issues is essential to quickly and equitably meet our ambitious clean energy goals.

Importantly, House File 5097 lays the groundwork for a cost-sharing program which could split necessary grid upgrade costs more fairly among projects that would benefit from the grid improvements and help ensure that planned clean energy projects can afford to interconnect. Also, by establishing an interconnection ombudsperson, the bill will increase transparency and accountability and make the process easier to navigate for new clean energy owners.

However, improvements to the bill are needed. We are concerned that the bill may not fully address the particular interconnection needs of rooftop solar projects under 40 kilowatts. We suggest the Committee considers an alternate path for these projects, distinct from the larger clean energy installations which this bill focuses on.

In addition, the PUC should be directed to incorporate energy justice screening and appropriate forecasting tools into the newly developed interconnection process, to enable equitable modernization of the electric grid and deployment of clean energy resources. Requiring the PUC to also complete an equity assessment of distributed generation and distribution system upgrades could help ensure that equity goals, including for the proposed interconnection ombudsperson, are being met.

Thank you for your initiative and leadership in addressing these urgent interconnection challenges. We urge you to support House File 5097, with improvements, in order to ensure a timely and equitable clean energy future.

Sincerely,

CLEAR Energy Coalition Members

Pouya Najmaie
Cooperative Energy Futures

Jenna Warmuth
Vote Solar

John Farrell
Institute for Local Self-Reliance