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Sierra Club Hoosier Chapter Supports Proposed Changes in Net Metering

The Sierra Club Hoosier Chapter applauds Rep. Ryan Dvorak for advancing the cause of net metering in Indiana. Net metering allows utility customers that want to generate their own power with renewable resources to send unused power onto the electricity grid and get credit on their bills. Dvorak's House Bill 1347 would greatly expand the size of the generating facility that would qualify, allowing capacity up to five megawatts. Current rules in Indiana allow only 10 kilowatts of capacity, which restricts qualifying generation to small solar panels and the like. No other net-metering state restricts the facility size to such small capacity.

Dvorak's bill would expand the list of customers who can take advantage of net metering. The current rule allows only residences and schools to participate. Dvorak proposes adding businesses, industries, agricultural enterprises, local and state government and post-secondary schools. The bill also expands the list of qualifying renewable technologies, adding generation from renewable fuels like biogas to the existing list of solar, wind and small hydropower.

The Commerce, Energy, Technology and Utilities Committee in the House of Representatives passed the bill on Thursday, Jan. 29. It will now go to second reading, at which time the full House can amend and vote on the bill.

Steve Francis, co-chairperson of the Indiana Sierra Club Chapter said, "allowing larger projects to access the electricity grid is a positive step to create jobs and encourage expansion of renewable energy – especially solar and wind -- in Indiana." Francis added, "Expanding net metering opportunities in Indiana will add one important tool to the list of proposed changes in Indiana's electricity portfolio, which can help customers cope with looming increases in the cost of electricity."

The federal government is expected to pass carbon legislation in the next year that will add to the cost of power that comes from facilities that burn fossil fuels. Indiana generates 96 percent of its power from coal-burning power plants, so ratepayers face potentially large increases in electricity rates. Other pending bills in the Indiana legislature that would update the state energy code for buildings, require utilities to get some of their power from renewable sources, and promote energy efficiency measures, along with expanded net metering, will help keep these rate increases to a minimum while addressing the need for new, renewable sources of energy.

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