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NCSEA Acts to Protect Rooftop Solar Market

Motion before NC Utilities Commission seeks to remedy negative effect from Duke Energy's statements regarding net-metering

RALEIGH, N.C. — In January, Duke Energy Corporation officials indicated that they will seek to reduce how much North Carolina households are paid for generating electricity from solar panels. On February 24, 2014, the North Carolina Sustainable Energy Association (NCSEA) filed a motion for disclosure and equitable relief at the North Carolina Utilities Commission. In the motion, NCSEA asserts that Duke Energy Corporation's recent statements that net metering shifts costs "from those who want solar panels to those who do not" are having a destructive "chilling" impact on the rooftop solar market in North Carolina.

Installers responsible for over half of the rooftop solar installations in North Carolina support the motion. In a statement attached to the motion, Jason Epstein, Executive Vice President and General Manager at Baker Renewable Energy, said, "Because of how Duke Energy Corporation is messaging without having filed anything definitive at the Utilities Commission, we are not in a position to be as responsive as we would like or to provide the customer service we would like." "This is bad for business," added Dave Hollister, President of Sundance Power Systems. Stewart Miller, President of Yes! Solar Solutions, stated, "I believe Duke Energy Corporation's mere messaging is contributing to potential rooftop solar customers sitting on the sidelines until there is more certainty about the future of net metering." Robert Kingery, President of Southern Energy Management, amplified Mr. Miller's statement: "Our sales team has reported that multiple clients are in a holding pattern, having expressed uncertainty and a desire to wait until the dust settles on net metering before making a solar investment."

NCSEA filed a 2013 Crossborder Energy study with the motion. Using data obtained from North Carolina utilities, the study concludes that "North Carolina ratepayers generally would benefit from the continued availability of net metering." The study also concludes that, based on the midpoints of the ranges of costs and benefits, the benefits of rooftop solar are 30% greater than the costs. Because the Crossborder Energy study indicates that net metering is more than fair to ratepayers, NCSEA is asking the Utilities Commission to order Duke Energy Corporation to provide the analysis supporting the utility's claims that net metering is unfair.

NCSEA's motion goes on to argue that the negative effect of Duke Energy Corporation's statements regarding net-metering is particularly damaging because it comes as the window of opportunity to make use of the state tax credit is quickly closing. "Given Duke Energy Corporation's market dominance, its messaging – timed as it is and in the absence of a filing at the Commission – constitutes a destructive competitive practice that runs counter to State policy and should be redressed."

Ralph Thompson, Board Chairman of the North Carolina Clean Energy Business Alliance, said, "As the motion points out, this type of destructive market influence is exactly why our State Constitution says monopolies are contrary to the genius of a free state."

About the NC Sustainable Energy Association:

Founded in 1978, the NC Sustainable Energy Association (NCSEA) is a 501(c)3 non-profit membership organization of individuals, businesses, government and non-profits working to ensure a sustainable future by promoting renewable energy and energy efficiency in North Carolina through education, public policy and economic development. Learn more at www.energync.org

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