

For the last few years, the Sierra Club has partnered with Neighbor to Neighbor and other allies to retire the Mt Tom coal plant in Holyoke. As we started meeting families the stories they told were very similar. Often it started with moving their family from Puerto Rico to Holyoke to be with family and the promise of a better job and better life. After a few weeks, a nagging cough would develop and after a visit with a doctor, a diagnosis of asthma. That diagnosis means keeping an eye open for air alert warnings on summer days, high monthly medical costs, emergency room visits, and missed classroom and work time across the family.

Now that the retirement of Mt Tom has been announced, those same families are working to make a cleaner, healthier Holyoke that works for everyone. This means continuing the growth of solar energy and solar jobs across Massachusetts. Net metering has been one of the primary drivers of the more than 800 MW of installed solar energy and 12,000 jobs in this state, however, that is now at risk because of arbitrary caps on net metering that have been reached in the 171 communities in National Grid territory and will soon be reached in the remaining towns in Eversource territory. The Sierra Club and residents of Massachusetts are here today to ask the legislature to immediately lift those caps and allow the solar industry to continue to grow and employ the people of this state.

In addition to immediately lifting the net metering caps, it is vital that the legislature take other actions to ensure that all families in Massachusetts have the opportunity to receive the benefits of solar energy. Recently, the Net Metering Solar Task Force of Massachusetts has recommended that the Department of Energy Resources conduct a study to demonstrate the value of solar. Similar studies conducted in our neighboring states show that solar does more than stabilize electric bills and reduce asthma causing pollution for residents and businesses. To receive the full benefits of solar energy, obstacles cannot be created to solar energy like fixed charges on electric bills, unnecessarily high monthly minimum bills, and lengthy interconnection times and costs. Instead, we need to raise solar energy caps to allow all Massachusetts residents to benefit from new jobs, clean air, and stabilized electric rates, without being set back by the high costs of dirty fuels. We should also bump annual increase in the Renewable Portfolio Standard from 1 to 2% to facilitate even faster, stronger clean energy growth for Massachusetts families.

For too long we have ignored the true costs of our energy decisions, allowing children and families to carry the burden of dirty fuels through high medical costs and impaired health from air and water pollution. Too much money has been leaving the checking accounts of families across the Commonwealth to pay for the true cost of our dirty energy. This committee and legislature can change that by reinvesting our energy dollars into solar and other clean energy resources that provide good-paying jobs in an economy that is built to last and allow our loved ones to breathe easier.