Environmental Advocates NY

SUPPORT

Major Benefit | Substantial Benefit | Benefit

The SUNNY Act

A.9111-C (Gallagher) / S.8512-C (Krueger)

Explanation:
Energy bills are rapidly increasing, and use of nonrenewable forms of energy in homes and commercial buildings is contributing to air and climate pollution. Solar energy is a crucially important tool in combatting both of these issues by helping consumers transition away from fossil fuels and making their energy more affordable. However, solar often comes with inaccessibly high startup costs, with installation of a 12kw solar system costing an average of $34,266.

Small portable solar panels, often referred to as “plug-in solar” or “balcony solar” devices, can help people supplement their homes with solar energy in an affordable, accessible way. These devices connect to a standard power outlet, cost anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars, and produce from 200–1,600 watts of energy. Plug in solar can save users $400-800 annually on energy bills. Although they don’t generate enough to power an entire household, they reduce the amount of non-renewable energy being used, can help people begin to transition to fully renewable energy in their homes or apartments, and can make a critical difference in ensuring that fixed and low-income individuals can get their energy needs met.

This bill defines plug-in solar devices as a distinct category from “solar generating equipment,” thus removing costs and regulations specific to larger-scale professionally installed rooftop solar systems. The SUNNY Act also exempts portable solar generation devices from interconnection or net metering requirements and requires the state energy conservation construction code to allow for portable solar generation devices to be connected to a building's wiring through an electrical outlet.

Additionally, the SUNNY Act requires the devices to be listed or certified by an accredited nationally recognized testing laboratory as a complete plug-in photovoltaic system to ensure consumer protection and standards. These certifications would help New York to safely implement plug-in solar, with standards similar to Germany, which have allowed German citizens to install over 500,000 plug-in solar devices with no reported safety or grid issues. The SUNNY Act is modeled after a bipartisan bill that passed in Utah to make plug-in solar accessible.

Millions of balcony solar units are already in use in countries like Germany and Canada, simultaneously lowering planet-warming emissions and household utility bills. Legalizing plug-in solar will help make access to renewable energy more equitable, help people save money on their energy bills, and aid in our transition away from fossil fuels.

Summary:
This bill amends Section 66-j of the Public Service Law to allow for small portable solar generation devices to be plugged into outlets in homes and apartments, removing regulatory barriers to an accessible form of renewable energy.