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STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

January 8, 2021 - 9:14 a.m.

[Remote hearing conducted via Webex]

RE: IR 20-192
INVESTIGATION INTO THE EFFECTS OF THE
COVID-19 EMERGENCY ON THE RENEWABLE
ENERGY INDUSTRY
(PUBLIC COMMENT HEARING)

PRESENT: Chairwoman Dianne Martin, Presiding
Commissioner Kathryn M. Bailey

Jody Carmody and Doreen Borden, Clerks
Eric Wind, PUC Remote Hearing Host

APPEARANCES: Reptg. Clean Energy NH:
Madeleine Mineau

Reptg. Revision Energy:
Daniel Weeks

Reptg. Granite State Solar.
Eric Kilens

Reptg. Aligned Climate Capital:
Andrew Catania

Reptg. Harvey Woods, LLC:
Gregory Dubela

Court Reporter: Susan J. Robidas, NH LCR No. 44

1 APPEARANCES (CONT'D):

2 Reptg. Froling Energy:
3 Mark Froling

4 Reptg. Lyme Green Heat:
5 Morton Bailey

6 Reptg. PUC Staff:
7 David K. Wiesner, Esq.
8 Karen Crampton

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P R O C E E D I N G

1
2 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Welcome,
3 everyone. We look forward to hearing from
4 you. We're here this morning in Docket IR
5 20-192, which is the investigation into the
6 effects of the COVID-19 emergency on the
7 renewable energy industry. We have to make
8 some findings because this is being held as a
9 remote hearing.

10 As Chair of the Public Utilities
11 Commission, I find that due to the State of
12 Emergency declared by the Governor as a
13 result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in
14 accordance with the Governor's Emergency
15 Order No. 12, pursuant to Executive Order
16 2020-04, this public body is authorized to
17 meet electronically. Please note that there
18 is no physical location to observe and listen
19 contemporaneously to this hearing which was
20 authorized pursuant to the Governor's
21 Emergency Order. However, in accordance with
22 the Emergency Order, I am confirming that we
23 are utilizing Webex for this electronic
24 hearing. All members of the Committee --

1 sorry -- the Commission, have the ability to
2 communicate contemporaneously during this
3 hearing, and the public has access to
4 contemporaneously listen and, if necessary,
5 participate. We previously gave notice to
6 the public of the necessary information for
7 accessing this hearing in the Order of
8 Notice. If anyone has a problem during the
9 hearing, please call (603)271-2431. In the
10 event the public is unable to access the
11 hearing, the hearing will be adjourned and
12 rescheduled.

13 Okay. We have to take a roll call
14 attendance of the Commission because this is
15 a remote hearing. My name is Dianne Martin.
16 I am the Chairwoman of the Public Utilities
17 Commission, and I am alone.

18 Commissioner Bailey.

19 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: Good morning,
20 everyone. Commissioner Kathryn Bailey, and I
21 am alone.

22 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. I have a
23 list of people that had pre-registered. I'm
24 going to read through it and see who is here

1 and who may not be. I have Madeleine Mineau,
2 which I can see on the screen. I have Dan
3 Weeks for Revision Energy. Okay. Paul, and
4 I apologize if I say your name wrong, Lesure,
5 and Eric Kilens from Granite State Solar
6 here -- I see one hand. And who are you? If
7 you can identify yourself.

8 MR. KILENS: Eric Kilens.

9 MR. LESURE: Paul Lesure is here as
10 well.

11 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Oh, okay. I
12 didn't see you. Okay. Thank you.

13 All right. I have Andrew Catania
14 and Brendan Bell from Aligned Climate
15 Capital. Are they here?

16 MR. CATANIA: Andrew's here.
17 Brendan will not be.

18 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Gregory
19 Dubela from Harvey Woods, LLC.

20 MR. DUBELA: Right here.

21 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Welcome.
22 Mark Froling from Froling Energy.
23 Mr. Froling?

24 MR. FROLING: Yes, I am here.

1 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
2 you.

3 Tom Garden from Triland Partners?
4 Mr. Wind, did you have him as
5 present?

6 MR. WIND: No, I have not. That's
7 the one that we're missing still at this
8 point.

9 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
10 you.

11 Morton Bailey. Am I missing you,
12 Mr. Bailey? Are you here?

13 MR. BAILEY: Good morning,
14 Chairwoman Martin. Thank you for having us
15 all together today.

16 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Good morning.
17 Welcome.

18 And someone from Lyme Green Heat.
19 Do we have Lyme Green Heat today?

20 MR. BAILEY: That is me,
21 Chairwoman. Morton Bailey.

22 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Oh, got you.
23 Okay. Great.

24 And we have Attorney Wiesner and

1 Ms. Cramton from the Commission. Yes, I can
2 see you both.

3 And I see Mr. Sheehan. Are you
4 planning to speak?

5 MR. SHEEHAN: I was not. Thank
6 you.

7 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Great.
8 Anyone that I did not call out?

9 [No verbal response]

10 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Well,
11 then, let's get started, starting with Ms.
12 Mineau.

13 MS. MINEAU: Thank you so much,
14 Chairwoman and Commissioners, for the
15 opportunity to speak with you this morning
16 about this important topic.

17 Clear Energy New Hampshire has
18 roughly 130 business members, representing
19 just about every aspect of the renewable
20 energy, energy efficiency, clean tech
21 industries in New Hampshire. And just like
22 every business this pandemic has hit, been
23 quite hard. There's been varying degrees of
24 severity and how their businesses have been

1 affected and have been able to adapt. But I
2 can assure you that both the pandemic itself
3 and having to adapt to new social distancing
4 requirements and health requirements, as well
5 as the economic impacts of the pandemic, have
6 affected our industries quite a bit in New
7 Hampshire. That includes increased costs for
8 personal protective equipment, having to have
9 workers go in separate vehicles to work
10 sites, workforce issues with folks having
11 childcare issues with schools being closed
12 and a variety of issues. So, certainly, just
13 like many businesses, the renewable energy,
14 energy efficiency, clean tech industries in
15 New Hampshire have been impacted quite a bit
16 by this pandemic. I do want to talk about a
17 few things and then some things that we think
18 that the Commission could do to, you know,
19 help things as we work towards economic
20 recovery in the state and recovering from
21 this pandemic.

22 Several of our members did want to
23 make sure that I bring to your attention a
24 recent report that Clean Energy New

1 Hampshire, Renewable Energy Vermont and Vote
2 Solar had commissioned from Synapse Energy
3 Economics. They conducted the report on new
4 data that was made available by ISO-New
5 England, which allowed them to do an analysis
6 of the value of distributed solar in New
7 England on wholesale market prices, both load
8 and price impact. And this showed total
9 savings of over \$1.1 billion in all of New
10 England over six years, from 2014 to 2019.
11 Of that, \$83 million was attributed to solar
12 in New Hampshire. The total value, when you
13 translate that to value in kilowatt hour of
14 energy generated from solar, that translates
15 to 11.9 cents per kilowatt hour just in
16 energy value. There's an additional 1.6
17 cents in avoided capacity value. So that's
18 13.5 cents. That's not counting any
19 environmental benefits, which pushes that
20 value to twice that. So that's considerably
21 more than what any solar or other renewable
22 energy at small scales that are operating
23 behind the meter or net metered or group net
24 metering are compensated at currently in New

1 Hampshire. I'm happy to share --

2 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Ms. Mineau --

3 MS. MINEAU: Yes.

4 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: That's what I
5 was going to ask, if you were going to have
6 or were planning to submit written comments,
7 if you could include that --

8 MS. MINEAU: Yes.

9 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: -- that would
10 be appreciated.

11 MS. MINEAU: I was going to say
12 that. I will make sure to share that report,
13 as well as a New Hampshire-specific fact
14 sheet that accompanied that report. I had
15 already shared it with several Staff members
16 of the Commission, but not directly with you.
17 So I will make sure to do that.

18 We think that renewable energy and
19 energy efficiency businesses in New Hampshire
20 represent an incredible opportunity to play a
21 very important role in the economic recovery
22 following the pandemic. And we think that
23 that's very important and that the Commission
24 does have a role to play in that.

1 The thing that businesses hate more
2 than anything and that is harmful to them is
3 uncertainty and unpredictability. And so we
4 think that that is something that the
5 Commission and all regulators should keep in
6 mind as we're in challenging economic times.
7 Certainly anything that can be done to reduce
8 uncertainty and unpredictability for
9 businesses will be helpful. In our view,
10 that includes expeditiously approving the new
11 Energy Efficiency Resource Standard Plan,
12 addressing current issues with the Renewable
13 Energy Fund rebate -- (connectivity issue)

14 [Court Reporter interrupts.]

15 MS. MINEAU: -- and grant programs,
16 the delays in the budgets. I think the lack
17 in communication. There's still a lot of
18 uncertainty from our business members and
19 ourselves as to, since some of the RFPs are
20 not issued yet, how in the world we're going
21 to be able to spend out the money from this
22 fiscal year within this fiscal year, and the
23 effects of the change -- the legislative
24 change that occurred in 2017 and why it's

1 just been implemented now. And in a
2 particularly challenging year, the fact that
3 it's being implemented now and the effects
4 it's going to have, that we anticipate that
5 several rebate programs are going to close
6 before the end of the fiscal year, it's just
7 making matters worse. So anything that could
8 be done to improve that would be greatly
9 appreciated.

10 We also would like to see
11 expeditious approval of the Clean Energy Fund
12 from the Eversource divestiture and not
13 having to wait for every single part of that
14 proposal to be ready to move forward to
15 approve any of the individual parts. We've
16 been working really hard with Commission
17 Staff, OSI [sic] staff and stakeholders to
18 try to reach consensus. And we're quite
19 close, but there are some parts that may need
20 further stakeholder involvement. And we
21 think that the parts that are ready to go
22 should move forward without waiting for the
23 other parts.

24 We would like to see progress on

1 grid modernization. The order was issued
2 last June, and then there was a request for
3 rehearing from Eversource, and we haven't
4 heard any progress since then or any
5 movement. There are some issues that are
6 really important to our businesses, including
7 interconnection procedures, hosting capacity
8 analyses, things that we think are important
9 to move forward on.

10 And finally, I'll just mention we
11 would like to see -- to ensure the progress
12 and completion of the electric vehicle time
13 of use dockets without delay as well. We
14 think those are important.

15 I'm happy to take any questions.

16 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Any questions,
17 Commissioner Bailey?

18 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: Yes, thank
19 you.

20 Ms. Mineau, you said in the
21 beginning of your remarks that there was a
22 13.5 cent kilowatt-hour something. I didn't
23 understand what that "something" was. Is it
24 savings? Is it costs? Tell me what it is.

1 MS. MINEAU: So Synapse did the
2 analysis, and they looked at depression of
3 cost in the wholesale market from behind the
4 meter solar, or what ISO-New England treats
5 as behind the meter solar, which is anything
6 below 5 megawatts. And they found that when
7 they translate that to a per-kilowatt-hour
8 value of generated solar, that value was 11.9
9 cents just in those wholesale energy savings,
10 and there's an additional 1.6 cents of
11 avoided capacity savings as well.

12 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: Okay. I'll
13 take a look at the report. Thank you.

14 MS. MINEAU: Thanks.

15 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
16 you, Ms. Mineau.

17 All right. Mr. Weeks.

18 MR. WEEKS: Good morning. Thank
19 you so much for the opportunity,
20 Commissioners, to share our perspective on
21 behalf of Revision Energy regarding
22 specifically the commercial solar market in
23 New Hampshire post-COVID. And I hope to
24 spend a little bit of time providing a little

1 bit of broader perspective that I think may
2 be helpful. I do thank you so much for
3 taking time to hear from the industry and
4 consider our experience and some of the
5 unique challenges that we've faced in the
6 course of this very unique last year.

7 My name is Dan Weeks. I am
8 director of market development for Revision
9 Energy. We are an employee-owned solar
10 company with close to 300 employee owners
11 across Northern New England. Our primary
12 markets have been Maine and New Hampshire
13 historically. We expanded into Massachusetts
14 three years ago and do a small amount of work
15 in Vermont. Historically, New Hampshire and
16 Maine have been roughly on par in terms of
17 market opportunity for our company, on both
18 residential and commercial. As I'll share
19 with you, that has changed quite radically in
20 the last year, in particular with substantial
21 growth in Maine and lack thereof in New
22 Hampshire.

23 Revision is also a certified B
24 Corporation, and we're proud that among our

1 300 co-owners, the majority are in the trades
2 directly, electricians or apprentices on the
3 road to becoming electricians who are
4 building systems every day, including on a
5 nice, sunny day like today.

6 Just for a little bit of background
7 on New Hampshire commercial solar coming into
8 the pandemic, and then I want to speak
9 directly to what we experienced, starting
10 with the stay-at-home in March.

11 So the Solar Job Census conducted
12 each year by the Solar Jobs Foundation found
13 that direct employment in New Hampshire solar
14 fell roughly 15 percent between 2017 and
15 2020. And I'll share some of the reasons
16 that we see that took place, mostly to do
17 with policy in New Hampshire. And even more
18 concerning, the number of solar companies
19 doing business in New Hampshire dropped over
20 that period, from 2017 to 2022 -- to 2020, by
21 fully 42 percent. And that was again before
22 the effects of the pandemic are taken into
23 account. For a company like Revision with a
24 strong footprint, arguably there's a

1 competitive advantage to seeing fewer
2 companies in the state, but that is not the
3 ecosystem that we want to see. And it's very
4 worrying to us and I think others in the
5 industry and beyond that we had such a
6 significant decline in the number of solar
7 businesses operating in New Hampshire.

8 Also worth noting that jobs in this
9 industry pay roughly twice the median wage of
10 prevailing jobs in New Hampshire. So that
11 loss in jobs did have an outside economic
12 impact on the state's economy as a whole,
13 again, prior to the economic effects of the
14 COVID pandemic.

15 Also worth noting that nationwide,
16 the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has found
17 that a solar installer has been the fastest
18 growing job nationwide over that same period,
19 2017 to 2020.

20 What we also saw moving from jobs
21 to overall role of solar as a contributor to
22 New Hampshire's energy is that, again,
23 between the period 2017 to 2020, New
24 Hampshire's solar ranking -- that is, the

1 percentage of state electricity coming from
2 solar -- fell from 33rd in the nation in 2017
3 to 41st today, and that is with less than
4 1 percent of our state's electricity,
5 .67 percent, coming from solar today as
6 compared to 17.4 percent in Massachusetts and
7 15.3 percent in Vermont. Maine, which was
8 the only state lagging behind New Hampshire
9 until last year, has undertaken some
10 substantial changes in policy and is now on a
11 very rapid growth path to, we expect in the
12 coming years, catch up with Massachusetts and
13 Vermont. And these statistics I will submit
14 to the Commissioners. These come from
15 reporting done on a quarterly basis by the
16 National Solar Energy Industries Association
17 and, as I mentioned, the Solar Job Census.
18 I'll be glad to submit the full details to
19 you.

20 So that's a little bit of the
21 context that we had coming in. And I did
22 want to mention those statistics because I
23 believe that while the immediate topic at
24 hand, the COVID impacts on the industry, are

1 very important, I do believe that there is a
2 larger context that has exacerbated the
3 challenges that we've seen which existed
4 prior to COVID and which, in my view, calls
5 for the Commission to consider and perhaps
6 pursue some alternative courses.

7 COVID impacts were, as Madeleine
8 noted, not dissimilar to what other
9 construction industries experienced.
10 Revision Energy does historically roughly
11 half of our solar business is residential,
12 the other half commercial. And we have -- as
13 of the stay-at-home in late March, we
14 suspended all residential installations of
15 solar, as well as complimentary technologies
16 on the thermal side, electric vehicle
17 charging and battery systems, so as not to
18 put any of our co-owners or, of course, our
19 clients at risk. So we immediately acted to
20 suspend all residential installations for the
21 month of April and May and then gradually
22 began re-initiating residential work in the
23 month of June. And it was only by mid, late
24 summer that we were back to more or less full

1 strength. We were, as a member of the
2 construction industry, technically exempted,
3 and so were allowed, under state rules issued
4 by the Governor, to continue installations.
5 But we felt it was prudent for the sake of
6 our customers and co-owners to suspend all
7 those operations.

8 As a consequence, as you can
9 imagine, our monthly revenues and net profits
10 dropped to near zero after a very strong
11 first quarter of 2020. We were at near zero
12 in the month of April and only gradually
13 rebounded, with the majority of the next six
14 months, those first six months of the COVID
15 impact, seeing lower net revenue than the
16 year before, even though company-wide,
17 particularly in Maine, there was strong
18 growth.

19 We did also, as a direct response
20 to the stay-at-home orders, have to furlough
21 roughly one third of our workforce.
22 Fortunately, with the help of the PPP loan we
23 were able to bring those employee owners back
24 by summer. But for much of the spring we

1 were operating at roughly two-thirds
2 strength.

3 This stands in stark contrast to
4 what we as a company, and I think other
5 companies, have seen across state lines,
6 particularly in Maine, where Revision has had
7 a strong footprint since 2003 when we were
8 founded. We've operated in New Hampshire
9 since 2009.

10 And just at a high level on the
11 jobs front, Revision added -- historically,
12 New Hampshire and Maine have contributed
13 roughly equal shares to our business, in
14 terms of total revenue, both residential and
15 commercial. But in New Hampshire this year,
16 we hired only half as many people as we hired
17 in Maine, and it was thanks to the strength
18 of the Maine market that we were able to make
19 any hires at all in New Hampshire and avoid
20 layoffs at the end of the day.

21 On the revenue side, we saw a
22 six-times growth in Maine commercial work as
23 compared to New Hampshire commercial work,
24 even though in the final quarter of the year

1 we were able to bring our commercial projects
2 back, particularly with an anticipated
3 step-down in the solar investment tax credit,
4 creating a sense of urgency for clients. We
5 did see a strong fourth quarter, but overall,
6 again, roughly one-sixth the amount of total
7 commercial work being closed in New Hampshire
8 as compared to Maine, whereas again
9 historically the two states have been roughly
10 on par.

11 I want to close by discussing some
12 of the impacts beyond just COVID because I've
13 shared some comparative numbers where, in
14 spite of the pandemic, our market performed
15 very well in Maine, but not well in New
16 Hampshire, and just a few reasons why we have
17 seen that be the case, having again more than
18 a decade footprint in New Hampshire and
19 nearly two decades in Maine, so we think a
20 fairly deep understanding of the two markets.
21 There are a number of factors, of course, at
22 play, but a few that I just want to bring to
23 your attention because they are directly
24 affected by or managed by the Public

1 Utilities Commission.

2 With respect to rebates, which
3 Madeleine referred to, we have seen a very
4 substantial, 90 percent, drop in rebate per
5 project rebate value from less than two years
6 ago, \$150,000 as the rebate ceiling, to now
7 \$10,000 as the rebate ceiling. There was an
8 intermediate step from 150 to 50,000. So
9 projects which historically were able to get
10 a significant boost in the form of a
11 substantial rebate are now looking, at best,
12 at a \$10,000 rebate. The formula as well has
13 dropped from 65 cents per watt to 40 cents
14 per watt as an intermediate step, and down to
15 20 cents per watt today. So the rebate
16 value, total value and formula, has dropped
17 very substantially, meaning that a lot of the
18 projects that Revision seeks to pursue as a
19 benefit corporation for local nonprofits, for
20 small businesses which really relied on those
21 rebates -- these are smaller commercial
22 projects, up to 500 kilowatts -- they have
23 become increasingly challenging to pencil
24 financially.

1 We have the rebate issue is one
2 that I know is being discussed, and it is
3 certainly our hope that monies previously
4 allocated for this purpose can be freed up.
5 We understand that they're not currently
6 available and that the current roughly
7 \$40,000 in available commercial rebate
8 dollars under the Renewable Energy Fund, that
9 that money will be very quickly spoken for.
10 And if indeed it needs to be -- it can only
11 can be applied to projects completed by June
12 of this year. That will mean that many
13 projects that would otherwise be eligible
14 will not.

15 At the end of the day, what this
16 means for my team and I in developing our
17 commercial projects is that we cannot in good
18 conscience represent to our clients that
19 there will be any rebate dollars at all,
20 either because it's not realistic to complete
21 the installation by a recently advised short
22 cutoff of June 7th, or simply because of the
23 small amount of money currently in the
24 Renewable Energy Fund. We don't want to

1 mislead our clients. So, unfortunately,
2 we're going from being able to represent
3 \$50,000 or even \$150,000 rebates to client to
4 now no rebates at all, at the same time as
5 the federal investment tax credit has stepped
6 down from 30 to 26 percent. So that is one
7 challenge.

8 Another is that the net metering
9 value, the effect of value since the 2017
10 ruling has very significantly impacted
11 project economics. Prior to 2017, as you all
12 know, there was one-to-one retail net
13 metering, which was in line with what we have
14 seen from other state Public Utilities
15 Commissions and independent studies of the
16 value of solar, so to speak. But with the
17 adjustment to large customer generator net
18 metering values -- so, systems over
19 100 kilowatts AC -- now being set at the
20 default supply rate only, we have seen that
21 the net value of any solar project that
22 crosses the 100 kilowatt threshold has gone
23 from a high default service value of 11.25
24 cents in Eversource territory to the latest

1 Eversource rate of 6.6 cents. So, again, the
2 value of solar generation once a system
3 crosses the 100 kilowatt threshold has
4 dropped almost in half, from 11.25 to 6.6
5 cents, meaning that the cash flows for a
6 customer, whether a town, non-profit or a
7 business that is considering solar, is now
8 far weaker than it was just a few years ago.

9 Again, I contrast this to
10 neighboring states where, through a process
11 established by the Maine PUC of empirically
12 assessing the value of solar in that state,
13 as Massachusetts has done, the current value
14 of solar in Maine above 100 kilowatts and all
15 the way up to 5 megawatts, rather than New
16 Hampshire's 1 megawatt cap, is now roughly 13
17 cents per kilowatt hour as compared to,
18 again, 6.6 cents in New Hampshire. In
19 Massachusetts, that rate has been as high as
20 21 cents per kilowatt hour.

21 One other related point is that
22 because that 100 kilowatt threshold, the
23 crossover from small to large customer
24 generator produces a substantial drop in the

1 effective value of solar, we feel it is
2 important for the Commissioners to consider
3 what we believe is within the Commission's
4 jurisdiction to adjust the threshold -- that
5 is, from small to large customer
6 generators -- to make it consistent with the
7 current threshold for Renewable Energy Fund
8 rebate-eligible projects. As you know,
9 projects are eligible for rebates up to 500
10 kilowatts, whereas at the 100 kilowatt point
11 they are considered large customer generators
12 for net metering purposes.

13 What it would mean if the
14 Commission did adjust that threshold from 100
15 to 500 kilowatts is that a large body of
16 prospective commercial projects in New
17 Hampshire, particularly for schools that
18 typically have enough roof space for anywhere
19 from 100 to 500 kilowatts, high schools being
20 the exception at roughly 1 megawatt, but most
21 elementary and middle schools can accommodate
22 in the somewhere up to 500 kilowatt range.
23 Many small businesses, including
24 manufacturers, are also in that range.

1 That's something of a sweet spot we see.
2 Those facilities that have ample on-site
3 load, so that they would consume most or all,
4 or sometimes much more electricity than
5 they're actually producing on their site,
6 then they would then be able to use that at
7 higher value to offset their on-site
8 consumption.

9 As you know, the crossover from
10 small to large customer generator not only
11 provides a reduction in energy value, as the
12 formula provides for only default supply, not
13 the transmission or one quarter of
14 distribution that is provided for large or
15 smaller systems, but it also results in
16 instantaneous netting rather than monthly
17 netting. And putting those factors together,
18 the effective result is that I and our team,
19 when we're sitting down with the local
20 business or non-profit that maybe has roof
21 space for 300 kilowatts, we have to advise
22 that they not cross the 100 kilowatt
23 threshold and therefore not offset a more
24 meaningful share of their load based on the

1 regulatory hurdle that we face.

2 So I know I've taken a fair bit of
3 your time. I would be very happy to answer
4 any questions you have. But I did want to
5 underscore that, again, harmonizing the small
6 customer generator threshold to bring the net
7 metering threshold so that it is consistent
8 with the Renewable Energy Fund rebate
9 threshold at 500 kilowatts would be a very
10 meaningful result to help a lot of small
11 businesses and non-profits go solar.

12 And then more broadly speaking, I
13 know the Commission is busy working on the
14 matter of the Value of Solar Study. I
15 believe that RFP was issued early this year.
16 I'm not aware if any vendor has been selected
17 or if that work has formally begun. But if
18 New Hampshire is able to follow the example
19 of all of our neighboring states, conduct an
20 empirical analysis, we expect, based on all
21 our neighboring states, that the results will
22 be an enhanced value for solar based on its
23 actual contribution to the grid, as the
24 Synapse study suggested, and that would

1 present a significant opportunity for the
2 growth of this renewable energy industry.

3 The final thing I'll say, and thank
4 you again so much for this opportunity, is
5 just that we see tremendous opportunity for
6 job and economic growth in New Hampshire. So
7 far, we have a bit over 100 megawatts of
8 installed capacity compared to several
9 thousand megawatts just south in
10 Massachusetts. That means that if we do
11 follow eventually this growth trajectory,
12 there will be many billions of dollars of
13 economic investment in New Hampshire to
14 generate renewable and ultimately very
15 low-cost energy for our state. We will able
16 to conserve today the roughly \$5 billion that
17 we export in New Hampshire dollars to import
18 non-renewable energy sources from outside of
19 New Hampshire. And most significantly, those
20 billions of dollars in future solar
21 investment that we do foresee will result in
22 many thousands of jobs paying well above New
23 Hampshire median wages. That's something
24 Revision is very committed to with an

1 in-house apprenticeship training program that
2 we launched two years ago. And we would love
3 to see that grow to keep more of our young
4 people in state, to provide good paths to
5 employment that aren't necessarily the
6 traditional college path, and to ultimately
7 help our local environment and sustainability
8 in the state.

9 So thank you again so much, and I'd
10 be happy to take any questions you may have.

11 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Commissioner
12 Bailey, do you have questions?

13 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: I have a lot
14 of questions, but I don't want to... I guess
15 my first question is do you believe that the
16 Commission has the authority to change the
17 threshold from 100 kilowatts to 500
18 kilowatts? Isn't that a legislative issue?

19 MR. WEEKS: Thank you, Commissioner
20 Bailey. I am not a lawyer and certainly not
21 an authority on the relative jurisdictions.
22 It is my understanding, having sat through a
23 number of legislative hearings, I believe,
24 and perhaps Madeleine can speak to this

1 further, that PUC Staff has represented to
2 the Legislature that they view it as being
3 within their authority. And again, because
4 of the disconnect between the current
5 threshold for REF rebates, which you do fully
6 administer, and the net metering thresholds,
7 I believe that it is. Perhaps Madeleine can
8 speak to that further.

9 MS. MINEAU: If you'd like me to
10 add. My understanding and what's been
11 discussed at the Legislature when this had
12 come up before, there was a bill to propose
13 this, making this change previously or
14 changing the thresholds by some amount. And
15 in those hearings, my understanding is that
16 House Bill 1116 -- (connectivity issue)

17 [Court Reporter interrupts.]

18 MS. MINEAU: -- which tasks the
19 Commission to review net metering tariffs,
20 included the authority to make changes,
21 including what is the definition of a large
22 versus a small customer generator. In the
23 net metering docket in 2016, 2017, that
24 demarcation was discussed and was part of

1 that order. So I think that further changes
2 could be made by the Commission.

3 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: And
4 Mr. Weeks, if we increase the threshold to
5 500 kilowatts, wouldn't that exacerbate the
6 rebate problem, in that we have less and less
7 money every year from ACPs to spend on
8 rebates? How do we deal with that?

9 MR. WEEKS: Thank you, Commissioner
10 Bailey. As a large part of my job, I spend
11 every day in cash flows, and so I'm aware of
12 the sensitivities of rebates as compared to
13 energy value. And I can say that in
14 virtually every case, energy value is a
15 significantly more impactful driver of
16 project economics, particularly in the last
17 year since rebate value dropped to \$10,000.
18 So, yes, we would expect that ACP revenues
19 would decline, and so REF funding would
20 probably also decline. But given a choice,
21 frankly, between higher energy value and the
22 loss of rebates, frankly, higher energy value
23 would make many more projects feasible, and
24 we would take that choice. Again, what we're

1 having to do today is, in my view,
2 artificially downsize projects, or even
3 discourage projects, or not pursue projects
4 for a large category of smaller businesses,
5 small to midsize businesses and non-profits
6 that have ample on-site load just because
7 they fall into a sort of doughnut hole.
8 There aren't the economies of scale. We
9 can't build quite cheaply enough to be able
10 to absorb that loss in energy value. But
11 they do have the space and certainly the load
12 to be able to use that power in the way that
13 a small customer generator typically does.

14 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: Can you talk
15 a little bit more about what you mean by
16 "energy value"?

17 MR. WEEKS: Sure. I referred to
18 the default supply rate, which for Eversource
19 is currently 6.6 cents, which is the net
20 metering value for any system of more than
21 100 kilowatts. As you may hear from others
22 this morning, and I didn't note this per se,
23 but that is actually a direct COVID impact,
24 in that the decline in that energy cost and

1 wholesale energy is linked to the drop in gas
2 prices as demand across the economy has
3 significantly slowed during the COVID
4 economic recession. So we do see that
5 significant drop from the high of 11.25 cents
6 as Eversource's default down to 6.6 cents as
7 being directly related to the COVID
8 challenge.

9 But to your question, that is the
10 key ingredient in energy value, what the net
11 metering rate is, based on the customer
12 generator class, whether small or large,
13 below or above 100 kilowatts. But the other
14 factor that we also model is their on-site,
15 behind the meter consumption. And this is
16 based on their current supply rates. So it
17 includes not just supply, but also
18 transmission, distribution of stranded costs
19 and systems benefits. We add those numbers
20 together, and then we analyze their historic
21 load to determine what percentage of their
22 consumption -- sorry -- what percentage of
23 their solar production will be net-metered
24 therefore will have to be sold at that energy

1 value, and what percentage will be used on
2 site to offset full retail value. This gets
3 a little bit into the weeds, but this is
4 where the monthly versus instantaneous
5 netting does have a very significant impact.

6 Again, a small customer generator
7 gets higher energy value and nets on a
8 monthly basis. So their excess daytime solar
9 production, as I have at my home solar array,
10 can offset energy consumption from the grid
11 that night or on a rainy day. And what
12 happens when we cross 100 kilowatts is that
13 the percentage of their solar generation that
14 ends up being sold to the grid because of
15 instantaneous netting can double or more;
16 that's to say that the amount of solar
17 offsetting full retail value goes down
18 substantially. The portion that is therefore
19 sold at the much lower default service rate,
20 the current 6.6 cents, goes up. And so the
21 net blended rate that we model in our cash
22 flow, which would ultimately be what I'm
23 referring to as the "value of solar," goes
24 down significantly. And again, we've seen

1 since the net metering ruling was implemented
2 in 2017, on the order of a 40 percent drop in
3 the effective value of solar for a typical
4 commercial customer.

5 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: Hasn't the
6 cost of solar per watt also significantly
7 declined since 2017? Can you talk a little
8 bit about what the cost was in 2017 and what
9 it is now?

10 MR. WEEKS: Thank you, Commissioner
11 Bailey. It has come down, certainly on the
12 hardware side. We have seen over the last
13 decade a roughly 70 percent decline. And in
14 the last three years that decline has been on
15 the order of 15 to 20 percent, just based on
16 the recent module pricing, solar panel
17 pricing and other equipment. What I should
18 note at the same time is that since 2017, as
19 we and other companies have begun to pursue
20 somewhat larger projects in New Hampshire, we
21 have run into far higher soft costs than we
22 had previously seen. If I can provide just a
23 few examples, not -- sorry -- not just soft
24 costs, but also costs on the interconnection

1 side that are not part of what we are
2 designing and specking for our clients. If I
3 can provide a few quick examples.

4 Historically, any system of more
5 than a few hundred kilowatts, for very
6 understandable reasons, requires a system
7 impact study through the utility. That is a
8 three- to four-month process where they
9 assess the local distribution grid capacity
10 at the substation, et cetera. Historically,
11 the cost of those has been \$5,000 or less. I
12 can't think of an example that exceeded
13 \$5,000, even though we had done several mid
14 to large commercial systems prior to 2017 or
15 2018. In the last two years, we've seen
16 costs for system impact studies go up to
17 \$25,000. And so as a matter of course, we
18 are budgeting \$10,000 for midsize systems and
19 \$20,000 or \$30,000 even for larger systems,
20 none of them of course exceeding 1 megawatt
21 today. So that's one cost that wasn't
22 historically part of the equation. It also
23 is a cost that doesn't benefit from the tax
24 incentives.

1 Likewise, we're seeing increasingly
2 that reclosers are being required. In
3 neighboring states where we work, a recloser
4 which provides additional control of the
5 distribution grid, the cost of those is
6 quoted in neighboring states at \$40,000 to
7 \$50,000. In New Hampshire, the cost of those
8 is quoted at \$100,000 by the utility. And we
9 have not been able to find the reasons for
10 that, why it is so much more expensive in New
11 Hampshire. But that is a cost outside of the
12 traditional cost stack for a commercial solar
13 project that we are increasingly facing for
14 any systems of about a half a megawatt and
15 above. And that is also a cost that does not
16 benefit from the tax incentive. So it's a
17 direct pass-through.

18 Finally, in terms of actual soft
19 costs, we do see disparate permitting
20 standards in every town. Each town has its
21 own zoning ordinance. A 30-foot setback in
22 one is 50 or 100 feet in another. The
23 definition of a building or a structure
24 varies from town to town. So we are

1 increasingly finding, as somewhat larger
2 projects come in development, that we have to
3 spend. The savings that we're realizing on
4 solar panel pricing, et cetera, is
5 unfortunately being offset more and more by
6 increasing soft costs, permitting,
7 environmental compliance, for a good reason,
8 of course. But that has also become much
9 more involved and costly just in this last
10 year through New Hampshire DES. And so put
11 all that together, and the net effect is
12 unfortunately only a modest reduction in
13 price per watt for systems in New Hampshire.

14 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: The
15 comparison that you made about the cost of
16 reclosers, were you comparing the same
17 utilities, or is that among different
18 utilities?

19 MR. WEEKS: Very good question,
20 Commissioner Bailey. That is from different
21 utilities. So quotes that we've had in other
22 states, the only utility -- I'm sorry. Both
23 Eversource and Unitil work across New
24 Hampshire and Massachusetts. Because of the

1 maturity of the Massachusetts market with
2 17 percent solar penetration, they are now in
3 a long-term process of making system-wide
4 grid upgrades. As a result, in the last two
5 years since we've had a strong footprint in
6 Massachusetts, there's been little
7 larger-scale commercial work. So we actually
8 haven't had to buy reclosers in
9 Massachusetts. But in Vermont and Maine,
10 we're seeing the costs. So not the same
11 utility across those state lines. But we are
12 seeing the costs at roughly half what they
13 are in New Hampshire.

14 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: And does the
15 same go for the interconnection studies and
16 those costs?

17 MR. WEEKS: So, thank you,
18 Commissioner Bailey. We have seen also
19 higher costs in New Hampshire, not quite as
20 much of a disparity. It does vary utility to
21 utility. In the case of Unitil, for
22 instance, we see much lower system impact
23 study costs. Those are based on their
24 Massachusetts guidelines which have input

1 from the Massachusetts PUC. So in New
2 Hampshire -- and I cannot tell you, again,
3 because we haven't been able to build larger
4 commercial systems in Massachusetts based on
5 the current state of their grid. I can't
6 give you a clean apples-to-apples comparison
7 within the same utilities. But I can say in
8 New Hampshire, Eversource, which accounts for
9 roughly 80 percent of load, and most of the
10 projects we pursue, is on the order of twice
11 or more the cost of what we see from Unitil,
12 based on Unitil's Massachusetts guidelines.
13 And I should note, Liberty, where we've also
14 done larger projects, tends to come in a bit
15 less than Eversource, but is also certainly
16 not inexpensive.

17 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: Okay. Thank
18 you very much. That's all I have, Madam
19 Chair.

20 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
21 you.

22 Mr. Weeks, I really appreciated
23 your presentation. It was very, very
24 helpful. I had a couple questions.

1 One, you mentioned the significant
2 growth in Maine, and you gave some
3 explanation for that. But particularly in
4 light of COVID, we've heard in New Hampshire
5 of significant impacts on the commercial
6 customers. So is that growth that you
7 mentioned still being seen in Maine during
8 the pandemic; and if so, how and why?

9 MR. WEEKS: Thank you so much,
10 Chairwoman Martin. Yes, we have seen
11 remarkable growth in the state of Maine
12 throughout 2020, with really no slowdown
13 during the pandemic, because the growth has
14 been in the larger commercial sector -- that
15 is, projects are generally remotely sited.
16 The work is entirely outdoors, over multiple
17 acres. So the ability for our teams to
18 maintain social distancing guidelines,
19 they're all wearing masks and taking daily
20 temp checks, et cetera, has been no
21 impediment to our ability to execute those
22 projects.

23 But the primary reason why we've
24 seen such strong growth in Maine, I'll

1 oversimplify a bit and point out the net
2 metering cap, which there was raised up to
3 5 megawatts, and the net energy billing, NEB,
4 value that was established in 2019 in the
5 state of Maine. And I briefly mention the
6 current value under their net energy billing
7 system, which is established -- a rate is
8 established for each utility once per year by
9 the Public Utilities Commission. That value
10 is currently 13 to 14 cents per kilowatt hour
11 in Maine, which is more than twice the
12 current, the latest Eversource default
13 service rate. And again, that is for systems
14 all the way up to 5 megawatts. And as you
15 can imagine, the economies of scale, the
16 build price per watt goes down significantly
17 when you move from 1 megawatt to 5, since the
18 greatest savings, to Commissioner Bailey's
19 point, have been in the equipment side. The
20 solar panels and other equipment has come
21 down in price with a bit of a blip from
22 tariffs that were imposed four years ago.
23 But where we have seen the economies of scale
24 combined with that significantly higher

1 energy value in Maine, based on their study
2 of the value of solar in that state, like
3 other neighboring states have done, has just
4 made the value proposition much, much
5 stronger in that state. And for that reason,
6 we and many other companies -- Revision is
7 fortunate to have worked in the state of
8 Maine for nearly two decades. But just in
9 the last year we have seen dozens of other
10 companies, some new start-ups from within
11 Maine, many national or regional developers
12 from other parts of the country, come into
13 that market. We've seen many millions
14 invested. Certainly the amount of solar
15 that's currently in the interconnection queue
16 represents several billion dollars of new
17 investment in that state and hundreds or a
18 few thousand jobs. But again, it's primarily
19 the ability to build up to 5 megawatts and
20 the value of solar being more than twice what
21 it currently is in New Hampshire that's
22 driving that growth.

23 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
24 you for that. How long -- I was interested

1 in the comment about the rebates and having
2 to be done in a truncated period of time.
3 How long does an average commercial
4 installation take? You're on mute.

5 MR. WEEKS: Thank you. Apologies.
6 Thank you for the question.

7 An installation itself, from the
8 point of contract signing to commissioning,
9 is at a minimum six months. But for most
10 systems -- and by commercial, I'm generally
11 referring to systems that are 100 kilowatts
12 or above, although we do some small
13 commercial work as well. Our friends at
14 Granite State Solar are also very familiar
15 with that market. But for any larger system,
16 we assume now that we have to go through a
17 three-month system impact study, which
18 follows the one-month pre-application process
19 with the utility. Those impact studies are
20 now often taking four or sometimes five
21 months to complete, although we've been told
22 the guidance is three months. So that
23 alone -- that's not something we can initiate
24 because it comes with a \$10- to \$20- or

1 \$25,000 price tag. So we don't initiate that
2 prior to contract signing. So that takes us
3 at least four months into a project.

4 And we cannot responsibly even
5 undertake procurement. We do undertake
6 permitting at some risk during that time so
7 that we're not too delayed in project
8 installation. But procurement, where we're
9 spending substantial six or seven figures for
10 a project, it is not responsible to undertake
11 that because the results do sometimes come
12 back negative, requiring very substantial,
13 costly system upgrades.

14 Most recently in Nashua, where I'm
15 based, we had to make some upgrades to their
16 substation in order to interconnect one of
17 their public schools. Fortunately, those
18 were fairly modest in that case. But that's
19 not something one has any visibility over
20 prior to the system impact study being
21 completed. And so to procure and take the
22 other steps so that we can then initiate
23 installation as soon as the impact study
24 results are in is challenging for any

1 company. Therefore, six months is really the
2 minimum time period. The actual installation
3 time is fairly short. For most commercial
4 projects, it's anywhere from two to six weeks
5 on site. But then there's generally at least
6 three to four weeks in additional time for
7 the utility and local inspector to complete
8 their inspections, for the utility to install
9 the net meter. And so, again, six months is
10 a very aggressive time period. More often
11 than not, we look at 12 months for most of
12 our commercial projects, at least 9 months.
13 And that assumes, again, contract is signed
14 on Day 1. The development process, often a
15 larger project will be preceded by a LOI,
16 letter of intent process, where we do some
17 initial diligence because there's enough
18 project uncertainty.

19 So what we see in reality for most
20 mid to larger projects is a 18-month to
21 24-month total development time from the
22 point at which they indicate their intention
23 to do a project, they complete their RFP and
24 make their selection, for example. Typically

1 18 to 24 months is the time line to actually
2 get the system turned on.

3 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
4 you. That helps.

5 Oh, no, you answered it for
6 Commissioner Bailey, related to the
7 reclosers. So thank you very much for your
8 presentation.

9 MR. WEEKS: Thanks so much for your
10 time.

11 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: You're welcome.
12 Moving on to Mr. Lesure and Mr. Kilens.

13 MR. KILENS: Hey, everyone --
14 (connectivity issue)

15 [Court Reporter interrupts.]

16 MR. KILENS: I hope everyone can
17 hear me. Thanks for the time today for
18 allowing me to speak. My name is Eric --
19 (connectivity issue), and I'm a senior
20 advisor here at Granite State Solar. I was
21 asked to speak today on behalf of Granite
22 State Solar to discuss how COVID-19 has
23 impacted our company. COVID-19 undoubtedly
24 has impacted our company. We used to come

1 into the office -- (connectivity issue)

2 [Court Reporter interrupts.]

3 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Do you have
4 headphones or anything you can plug in to
5 make it a direct connection?

6 MR. KILENS: -- (connectivity
7 issue) let me see if I can grab some.

8 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: If anyone needs
9 a two-minute break, feel free to take one.

10 (Brief recess taken at 10:10 a.m., and
11 the hearing resumed at 10:14 a.m.)

12 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Let's go back
13 on the record, Ms. Robidas.

14 Go ahead, Mr. Kilens.

15 MR. KILENS: So as I was saying,
16 after the March shutdown, it caused really a
17 big slow first and second quarter for our
18 company. In particular, our sales slowed and
19 so did our installs. Ever since then, you
20 know, temperature checks and sanitization of
21 our trucks and equipment are now done each
22 and every morning by our installers before
23 leaving the job site. On the job site, masks
24 and gloves are worn, and surfaces that are

1 touched are constantly being sanitized. You
2 know, making sure that all of our employees
3 and customers are safe is definitely our top
4 priority. It has, though, created
5 inefficiencies for us along the way,
6 ultimately affecting our bottom line. You
7 know, so as a small business, we're proud to
8 be where we are today. But we had been
9 struggling before COVID hit due to certain
10 market uncertainties created by policy
11 fluctuations.

12 So just to first give you all a
13 little bit of a background of myself. I've
14 been working at Granite State Solar for five
15 years now. And I was born and raised and
16 educated in New Hampshire, getting my
17 bachelor's degree at the University of New
18 Hampshire. And straight out of college,
19 Granite State Solar was my first real
20 professional job. And "GSS," for short,
21 offers really great paying jobs. All
22 employees are offered health insurance,
23 401(k) plans, and are provided paid time off
24 with -- we don't lay off any of our workers.

1 We're not like a seasonal company. We work
2 straight through the wintertime. And working
3 for GSS really gave me an opportunity to save
4 a lot of money and put a down-payment on a
5 home and eventually become a homeowner in New
6 Hampshire and start a family here. Since
7 owning my home, I've added solar here myself.
8 And I've replaced my old, inefficient
9 oil-fired boiler with a high-efficiency,
10 ductless mini-split system. So I'm telling
11 you this little story of mine because I think
12 it's a good example that solar creates good
13 paying local jobs that really helps to
14 stimulate the local economy, and it
15 encourages the money to stay local.
16 Furthermore, it encourage young professionals
17 like myself to stay and work in New Hampshire
18 instead of looking for work outside of the
19 state. I can just list a number of my
20 friends from college who are now maybe living
21 in New Hampshire but are commuting out of
22 state for work. And I'm proud to be one of
23 those where I can live and work in New
24 Hampshire.

1 As people have previously said on
2 this Webex, the State of New Hampshire has a
3 tremendous amount of potential growth for
4 solar. Currently there's less than 1 percent
5 of the state's electricity coming from solar.
6 So there is this huge potential for growth to
7 further strengthen and improve the local
8 economy while also adding more clean energy.
9 And solar has not only shown to be good for
10 the local economy, but it also benefits all
11 of the electric utility customers. As
12 Madeleine previously said, that 2020 Synapse
13 report showed that solar saved electric
14 ratepayers in New Hampshire about \$83 million
15 from 2014 through 2019. So that's all great.

16 But within the past five years,
17 personal experience of working in the solar
18 industry, I've only seen the industry worsen
19 and not improve. And it's discouraging to
20 see. In fact, within just the last year
21 alone, New Hampshire slid from 33rd to 41st
22 in the nation for solar. And I can just
23 attribute I think a couple of examples to why
24 New Hampshire is so lowly -- so low-ranked

1 for solar; one being, I think, is the
2 residential and C&I rebates year after year
3 have consistent been getting reduced. And in
4 some instances this money gets used up before
5 it can get replenished again. And that big
6 disruption in the rebate program creates
7 uncertainty for new, potential customers of
8 ours to move forward with their project, and
9 that causes our business to become stagnant
10 and slow down.

11 Another huge reasoning I think is
12 what I've seen as continual rate changes
13 caused by net metering inconsistencies. And
14 this has caused constant system design
15 alterations for solar developers like Granite
16 State Solar.

17 So what I think needs to happen is
18 rates need to stabilize to give more
19 consistency for the industry. What I mean by
20 this is, ever since net metering 2.0 went
21 into effect, Eversource specifically has been
22 changing the rates to make net metering less
23 favorable for residential customers. For
24 example, charges that customers get paid for

1 while net metering, such as the supply charge
2 as Dan has mentioned, have been getting
3 reduced. Supply was at 11 cents, now it's
4 down to 6 cents I think, while at the same
5 time non-net-metered charges, such as the
6 stranded cost recovery charge and the system
7 benefits charge, have actually been
8 increasing. So with Eversource specifically,
9 the difference between the export rate and
10 the import rate is getting larger, which is
11 in return causing solar developers to have to
12 build larger PV systems for customers in
13 order to offset their electric bill. And
14 what this means is it directly translates
15 into having to build larger systems and more
16 expensive systems, and less net in return
17 causes a less favorable return on investment
18 for the homeowner. Looking at this for the
19 last four years, from 2018 until now, it
20 looks like that gap between the export rate
21 and the import rate has almost nearly
22 doubled.

23 So, moving forward, Granite State
24 Solar would like to see work done to help

1 stabilize the net metering incentives so
2 customers can have more certainty and a more
3 clear outlook on their investment with solar.
4 And we'd also really like to see investments
5 made into energy storage. I do know that
6 right now that Eversource has a pilot program
7 for a battery demand response program. And
8 we'd love to see that go forward for a more
9 permanent offering. I think battery storage
10 offers home resilience for homeowners. And a
11 recent study was conducted by Green Mountain
12 Power in Vermont, that utility, and it showed
13 that it saved its ratepayers approximately
14 \$3 million from its growing infrastructure of
15 energy storage systems. So that study alone
16 shows that all parties can benefit. The
17 homeowner can get home resiliency for having
18 a battery, and it also can help non-solar
19 customers as well.

20 So just wanted to keep my speech
21 really short and simple, so that's all I have
22 for you guys. And so again, I just want to
23 say thank you for the time.

24 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Thank you, Mr.

1 Kilens, and thank you for sharing your story.

2 Commissioner Bailey, do you have
3 questions?

4 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: Just one.
5 Mr. Kilens, does Granite State Solar deploy
6 energy storage with their PV arrays, or are
7 you thinking about doing that?

8 MR. KILENS: Right now we do offer
9 battery storage systems for our customers.
10 We do offer the Tesla Powerwall and also the
11 Enphase battery system as well. Right now,
12 customers, our customers are really only
13 using those batteries for battery backup.
14 But we would really love to see our customers
15 use the battery and participate in like a
16 bring your own device program or a demand
17 response program that has been already
18 initiated with Eversource in Massachusetts
19 and Connecticut. So...

20 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: Thank you.

21 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
22 you, Mr. Kilens. I don't have any questions.

23 MR. KILENS: Okay. Thank you.

24 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: All right.

1 Moving on to Mr. Catania.

2 MR. CATANIA: Hello. Good morning.
3 Thanks very much to you, Chairwoman Martin,
4 and the Commissioners and Staff for the
5 opportunity to testify today. My name is
6 Andrew Catania. I'm a VP with Aligned
7 Climate Capital. We are an active investor
8 in distributed solar assets within the New
9 England market, including the state of New
10 Hampshire, where we have seven large-scale
11 solar projects. And as others have noted,
12 we'd like to draw the Commission's attention
13 to the significant reduction of the default
14 energy service rate over the past year.

15 To provide a little background on
16 large-scale solar investing, a project's
17 capital expenditure is generally funded with
18 a combination of equity and debt. And that's
19 secured and repaid with the long-term cash
20 flows that are associated with the project's
21 sale of electricity for 20-plus years,
22 sometimes longer. And so when financing
23 these types of kind of long-lived assets,
24 where you have a bulk of costs that are

1 upfront during a project's construction, it's
2 very important to have a high degree of
3 revenue certainty so that a project can be
4 confident that it can repay its debt service
5 and generate cash flow.

6 So under the PUC 900, the group net
7 metering tariff, these large-scale projects
8 are compensated under a utility's default
9 energy service rate. And so taking
10 Eversource as an example, from 2005 to 2019,
11 the default energy service rate has averaged
12 9.2 cents per kilowatt hour. And over that
13 15-year period, it's had about a 1.6 percent
14 inflation rate. So there's been some
15 fluctuation in that rate year to year. But
16 historically, it demonstrate a level of
17 stability. So in late December, we saw the
18 default energy service rate approved for the
19 upcoming six-month billing cycle, from
20 February to July, decline from an average of
21 9.7 cents in 2019 to 6.6 cents for the
22 upcoming period, which represents about a
23 30 percent decline in the rate. And so from
24 our perspective, you know, we believe that

1 low energy costs are good for consumers. But
2 what's concerning here is kind of the abrupt
3 and significant change. It really creates
4 revenue uncertainty for the long term that
5 could be damaging for solar investment within
6 the state. And then, again, as others have
7 noted, it presents operational cash flow
8 challenges for projects.

9 So we would just -- I have two
10 recommendations for the Commission's
11 consideration. We would just encourage the
12 Commission to, you know, use any existing
13 authority to help provide rate stability in
14 the market; and then No. 2, we believe it's
15 just important to value solar for its total
16 system benefits. So we would just encourage
17 the Commission to proceed with its work
18 regarding the value of solar.

19 So, thanks very much. And again, I
20 appreciate the opportunity to provide
21 feedback.

22 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Commissioner
23 Bailey, questions?

24 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: No.

1 And thank you for your comments.

2 MR. CATANIA: Thank you.

3 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Your
4 first point. You said "use existing
5 authority to provide rate stability." Can
6 you walk me through what you think the
7 authority is and what we can do there?

8 MR. CATANIA: I don't think we have
9 a specific recommendation. We would just,
10 you know, encourage the Commission to think
11 about ways you might be able to address the
12 issue. I think we know that in the PUC 900
13 tariff there is, I believe, reference to a
14 value of solar rate. So potentially there
15 could be work that's done on that front.

16 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
17 you, Mr. Catania.

18 MR. CATANIA: Thank you.

19 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: All right. Mr.
20 Dubela.

21 MR. DUBELA: Can everybody hear me?

22 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Yes.

23 MR. DUBELA: Fantastic. All right.
24 Let's make this happen.

1 So, hi. My name's Gregory J.
2 Dubela. I'm the founder and owner of Harvey
3 Woods, LLC. We're located in Stratham, New
4 Hampshire right now. If you'd like to get in
5 contact with me, please send me an email at
6 greg@harveywoods.io.

7 First, I would like to thank the
8 New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission for
9 hosting this event, bringing regulators and
10 solar energy companies together, and
11 Government together, so we can assure that
12 our great state has a bright energy future in
13 the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

14 So I had no idea that I would be
15 launching a solar energy company during a
16 pandemic. Yet, with progress on homes
17 installed, I speak to you all today as
18 someone determined to positively impact New
19 Hampshire families across the state.

20 Our industry provides an asset and
21 distributed utility that directly lowers a
22 family's cost of living. With the transition
23 to work from home and remote learning, New
24 Hampshire families are now paying the energy

1 costs, among other things, that their
2 employers and schools used to cover. Add
3 social distancing, self-quarantining,
4 restaurant and bar shutdowns, and overall
5 higher utility consumption, these families
6 need our industry right now in a way that's
7 smart, doesn't increase taxes, and is
8 implemented in a way that everybody can
9 understand. It has to be intuitive.

10 To put how important our industry
11 is right now in New Hampshire, before the
12 global shutdown, 63 percent of Americans
13 couldn't afford an unexpected \$500 car repair
14 bill. And I can only imagine what some
15 families right now are going through.

16 The whole strategy that I've been
17 having is how can I deliver solar to the
18 people who are going to benefit and need it
19 the most, because the more that we can create
20 a social safety net with stable energy and
21 create available funds in a environment, a
22 lending environment where there's just a lot
23 of printing of money, we can provide energy
24 security. That is one of the most impactful

1 things that we can do for families, in terms
2 of not only deploying a COVID response right
3 now to address issues, but also putting in
4 short-term things where we can scale the
5 industry, because this COVID pandemic is not
6 a one-year thing. It's not a two-year thing.
7 It's not a five-year thing. We are looking
8 at, over the course of a decade, how can we
9 transition those who were impacted the most
10 in the state with COVID-19 and provide the
11 infrastructure where when they are able to
12 scale and have available funds, they can use
13 those monies to help build the economy. I
14 think solar energy does just that.

15 So, on March 6, 2020, I was hired
16 by Aaron Russell, of Solar Endeavors, for my
17 expertise in solar energy and emerging
18 technologies to help grow the business. The
19 company featured UNH engineering graduate
20 installers, "hackathon" winners, and was a
21 pretty old solar company in the state, with
22 hundreds of installs actively producing
23 energy. We were young, filled with energy,
24 had an owner that allowed us to innovate, and

1 we were in an industry that will have a
2 profound impact on the future of our local
3 communities.

4 Also at the time, rumors of a novel
5 virus from China started circulating, and
6 talk of a global shutdown started emerging
7 online, which I was trying to keep a pulse
8 on. And since at Solar Endeavors the company
9 was very "mom and pop" in terms of business
10 structure, it was primarily paper-based.
11 They used a centralized office. There wasn't
12 any computer networking or anything like
13 that. So my first order of business
14 immediately was developing a digital
15 strategy, a COVID transformation plan, and
16 also developing an infrastructure that would
17 allow us to keep operations going in the
18 event that all employees would have to work
19 remotely and there could be no in-person
20 contact, or absolutely minimal in-person
21 contact, you know, throughout a completed
22 job.

23 By May 20, 2020, Aaron Russell had
24 passed away at 57 years old, and the company

1 became reliant on me. And I would spend -- I
2 spent the next 30 days at that point -- I've
3 never worked so hard in my entire life -- to
4 ensure that my team had jobs in the pipeline,
5 money was coming through the door, to make
6 sure that people were getting paid. And it
7 was one of the most challenging things that
8 I've ever seen, in terms of, you know, life
9 challenges and difficult hurdles that I had
10 to hop over. And, yeah, I just don't think
11 I've ever worked this hard before in my
12 entire life.

13 By June, thank goodness, Aaron's
14 girlfriend assumed ownership of the company
15 and helped to take care of a couple credit
16 lines which we accrued before Aaron's
17 passing. And she also helped me get the
18 company filed for the SBA and PPP loans, and
19 also helped legally transition the business
20 so we could kind of deal with a death at the
21 height of the pandemic and a global shutdown.
22 So I believe we became one of the, at that
23 point, one of the only female-owned solar
24 energy companies in the state. Small team

1 right out of Rye, New Hampshire,
2 female-owned. We had a lot going for us.

3 Although I was able to maintain our
4 previous year's installation goals, the
5 changes in the industry landscape -- for
6 example, in terms of sales, things like
7 door-to-door, can't do that, channel
8 accounts, all of a sudden we can't do that,
9 really. Traditional sales operations, all
10 these different things changed. And what
11 that --

12 [Court Reporter interrupts.]

13 MR. DUBELA: I'll slow down for
14 you. This is my first time speaking with you
15 all, so bear with me. I'll slow it down.

16 So let's see. So traditional
17 business operations for solar. Solar finds a
18 lot of success. It's an in-person type of
19 product and service that requires -- it has a
20 long networking time. It generally has a
21 longer project-type line as opposed to other
22 purchases that consumers can make in their
23 homes. The different ways of diversifying
24 the type of information that goes out -- so

1 you have things like doing channel accounts,
2 door-to-door, traditional sales operations --
3 all these different things changed. And what
4 this forced -- and I believe -- let's see
5 here -- what Mr. Weeks was saying with direct
6 employment falling by about 15 percent, and
7 what Mr. Kilens, I believe, if I got that
8 right, was kind of saying, you know, the
9 industry, there's kind of a worsening feel to
10 things. The purpose of me trying to speak to
11 everybody is saying what are these different
12 symptoms, if you will, and how can we create
13 a multi-stakeholder approach to not only
14 solve these things in an emergency order, but
15 also to develop rules, regulations and ways
16 of doing things that ensure success later on
17 down the road.

18 So let's see here. So all of those
19 things were changed. And by November 20th,
20 2020, Solar Endeavors was forced to shut its
21 doors. And I was looking at an interesting
22 moment where, when we looked at the job
23 market, other solar companies were trying to
24 handle their own things with the employees

1 and obligations of their teams that they
2 already had. And I said to myself -- after
3 speaking with the new ownership, they asked
4 me -- they said, hey, continue moving
5 forward. Fire up a new LLC and keep doing
6 what I've been doing. So that brings me
7 where I am today. There were heartbreaks
8 along the way, and COVID-19 impacted Solar
9 Endeavors in a profound way. The light, if
10 you will, is that this taught me a lot that I
11 would like to let you all know about.

12 So I believe that creating some sort of
13 state initiative and a specialized task force
14 charged with identifying, developing and
15 deploying solar energy solutions that makes
16 our industry faster, more secure and
17 affordable for the local families and
18 businesses who need us should be our primary
19 focus, a data-driven approach, because our
20 industry right now currently faces three
21 major challenges that hurts our
22 profitability. It hurts our ability to bring
23 in reliable business, all these different
24 things that everybody's kind of bringing up.

1 First one is our industry is
2 predominantly paper-based, and all of our
3 companies are digital; second point I want to
4 mention is our data is extremely siloed; and
5 third is our incentive programs aren't
6 competitive enough, from my perspective.

7 So when I say our industry is
8 paper-based, our companies are digital, what
9 do I mean by that? Well, we use digital
10 infrastructure for business operations. We
11 all use e-mail and things like that. But the
12 underlying value drivers that run the
13 processes are still PDFs, or paper-based
14 documents. They're tedious when working with
15 them. And when you're working from home,
16 where printing may not be an option, it's
17 just a tedious thing. And it doesn't allow
18 for a standardized, streamlined database to
19 occur, where more innovation can be built and
20 we can save costs by not wasting time.

21 So, for example, let's say I want to
22 interconnect. I need to go to the utility
23 web site, download their PDF application,
24 enter all the customer's information, system

1 size information, all these things that
2 everybody's familiar with. I generally will
3 have to use a third-party software for that.
4 Then you have to send the PDF out for
5 signature, receive it, submit the whole thing
6 with supplementary attachments to a dedicated
7 e-mail address. And that is a long, lengthy
8 process when we have very cheap digital
9 systems that can start saving here and saving
10 there.

11 The transformation of paper-based
12 information into a digital-exclusive format
13 with database standardization and regulation
14 across townships and utilities would
15 accelerate the approval process between
16 townships and utilities, reduce the impact of
17 administrative errors which tend to add time
18 to a relatively simple project, and it
19 reduces the need for unnecessary
20 communication and costs associated with that.
21 If we brought together key stakeholders in an
22 endeavor, if you will, to develop a
23 standardized kind of database and procedure,
24 we could allow for solar companies to

1 complete more jobs faster, which means more
2 people from New Hampshire saving with solar
3 energy.

4 Second big issue that I saw as a small
5 business going through COVID was that data in
6 our industry is extremely siloed. And a
7 large degree of complexity from solar energy
8 projects involves just organizing
9 communications and making sure that
10 everybody's on the same page with the right
11 data. And the reason that this happens is
12 because everything's siloed. It kind of goes
13 back to what I'm pointing out with these
14 PDFs. It doesn't allow for innovation in new
15 companies to create more efficient solar
16 companies, like kind of these service
17 companies.

18 Going back to that 10 kW example. If we
19 look at interconnection, building and
20 electrical permits, structural reporting,
21 state rebate applications, renewable energy
22 credits, we find that we are largely entering
23 the same exact information like four or five
24 different times across four or five different

1 applications that are being sent to, like,
2 four or five different e-mail addresses. And
3 the problem is that we don't have an
4 infrastructure, like a regulatory
5 infrastructure, that's capable of connecting
6 these multiple independent systems together,
7 which causes our industry to be
8 administratively complicated, labor-intensive
9 and slow.

10 So if we want to turn around the solar
11 industry, we need to focus on the things that
12 make it where projects take too long to
13 install. We want to focus on things where,
14 if we can save labor hours and administrative
15 costs, we want to do those things. We want
16 to basically always be installing. We don't
17 always want to be doing paperwork. The more
18 paperwork we're doing, the less energy we're
19 delivering to the state, and it ends up
20 costing a lot of money. And it was something
21 I worked on very heavily at Solar Endeavors,
22 was how do I automate that system to take
23 something that takes two hours and boil that
24 down to five or ten minutes and have it in a

1 database. So it causes us to be slow. If we
2 were to kind of have a shared platform, it's
3 going to save us time and it's going to save
4 us money. It's going to be easier to resolve
5 administrative errors. So, for everybody,
6 when there's something on an application or
7 something like that, generally speaking, that
8 error can be found across the applications.
9 You have to go into each one and basically
10 resubmit and do all that. And then there's
11 the -- it reduces, once again, the need for
12 unnecessary communications and costs.

13 And so if we were to bring together a
14 specified team and develop a better shared
15 system or a methodology, if you will, on how
16 this information is going to be handled in
17 the state of New Hampshire, it would allow
18 for more growth. And price competitiveness
19 will start occurring because all of a sudden
20 you're lowering kind of the knowledge barrier
21 for more people to create solar energy
22 companies and provide a unique value set.

23 The final thing I want to bring up was
24 our incentive programs are not competitive.

1 I think, yeah, we're ranked 41st. And this
2 is really an important thing to think about,
3 if we're talking about senior citizens who
4 need energy stability, if we're talking about
5 a family of four, where if they can save \$150
6 off their energy bill, that feeds people when
7 they need it the most. And solar can do
8 that. But the issue is solar energy systems
9 are expensive. Like I said, it's like
10 63 percent can't afford \$500 bucks if their
11 car breaks down. Solar energy is expensive.
12 And we have an incentive program that does
13 not drive the consumer enough to lead to
14 energy transition. And more importantly, it
15 bars New Hampshire families who generally
16 need the most financial relief from solar.
17 It bars them from being able to take
18 advantage of that.

19 So SRECs are a response to that. I
20 believe everybody knows how RECs work, in
21 terms of 1 megawatt hour of verifiable
22 energy, a price being determined by market's
23 willingness to pay for them, the size of the
24 market, consumers that are willing to

1 purchase them. And usually homeowners agree
2 to sell them and all that.

3 But when we look about 40 miles south,
4 Massachusetts dwarfs New Hampshire in terms
5 of financial benefit as well. The only two
6 things that Massachusetts and New Hampshire
7 have in common with their programs is they
8 suffer from the same paper-based, siloed data
9 problems that the building permits and
10 interconnection applications present, where
11 we're just wasting time entering the same
12 exact information on just a document that has
13 a small, minute change to it. When we looked
14 at really large companies, what we're
15 starting to see is companies working with
16 townships, utilities, regulatory agencies to
17 create standardized templates of specific
18 kinds of systems, like highest impact
19 systems, that way you can have accelerated
20 installs and things like that.

21 In terms of the RECs, we don't really
22 have like the regulatory framework, the
23 government legislation or even the correct
24 technology required to levelize SREC prices

1 across state lines.

2 One more long-term thing that I would
3 recommend when we're talking about how do we
4 create a high-impact COVID-19 program that
5 scales into the future of the grid when we're
6 talking about more grid-connected devices and
7 that accelerating. One of those long-term
8 things is creating a very competitive REC
9 program utilizing some disrupted technologies
10 that are having a very high impact globally
11 right now. And if you go to Portsmouth, we
12 have some of the best developers in the world
13 creating these technologies. The REC
14 program, most importantly, would reduce cost
15 barriers for families, would create new
16 markets and job growth in the state. And it
17 has the potential, if you were to use the
18 right technology stack, it would have the
19 potential to scale past New Hampshire. Very
20 powerful stuff.

21 So if we were to bring people together
22 and develop a more competitive REC program,
23 state-of-the-art REC program that solves not
24 only issues that we see in New Hampshire, but

1 a lot of these issues that are copied and
2 pasted, we could allow for the average family
3 to afford our products and services and grow
4 our industry in a way that traditional
5 utility companies can't really do.

6 I understand that these recommendations
7 are not necessarily simple, but they're also
8 not impossible. And our state has more than
9 enough talent to make these changes happen.
10 If we look at the Town of Portsmouth, or
11 Unitil, we can see that we're already taking
12 the steps necessary to achieve some of the
13 goals that I just mentioned. We basically
14 need companies to work together to create a
15 symbiotic data relationship so we're all
16 better off. Through the creation of that
17 dedicated team, I think what you're going to
18 see is the ability for different perspectives
19 from different companies to look at the same
20 problem and provide unique ways of innovating
21 on that problem.

22 When we're talking about COVID-19, the
23 entire planet shut down. And that should
24 make the hair on your arms raise up. And we

1 need solar energy because solar energy is
2 stable. The sun comes up every single day.
3 It doesn't have the geopolitical stresses
4 that I believe when we turn on the TV we all
5 see going on right now. And so solar energy
6 is a form of social stability, such that all
7 of the costs associated with trying to
8 maintain the other systems would slowly
9 dwindle away.

10 The reason that I'm here is because I
11 think that very small changes can have huge
12 financial impacts for everybody. If we can
13 save time when we are submitting
14 applications, if we can have it where we have
15 digital systems and big data can be used so
16 we can have more intelligent decisions, this
17 is the direction that I would like to see the
18 industry go. And I would love to see
19 somebody kind of pioneer that and assume a
20 leadership role and make that happen. And
21 those are the kinds of things that I was
22 thinking about when we're talking about
23 global pandemic, poverty, kids working
24 from -- kids and remote. Like all these

1 different things are very powerful things.
2 And these things are applied to every single
3 state, and everybody is suffering this.

4 And everybody needs electricity. And we
5 are more digital than ever, and our energy is
6 coming from one centralized utility. And
7 from a national security standpoint, I would
8 have to push the ball forward and say not
9 having energy diversity in our grid and
10 developing a national global COVID-19
11 pandemic plan that doesn't think about energy
12 diversity and the implications about having
13 that are very serious, powerful things.

14 And so the reason that I'm standing in
15 front of this Commission is because these are
16 the things that, over the course of 2020,
17 when the government was shutting down, these
18 were the things that I was working on
19 developing and trying to figure out not
20 necessarily how do I help my company, but how
21 do I position a product in such a way where
22 the people who need it most can benefit the
23 most from it. And if we can create a social
24 safety net out of energy, the impact that

1 that will have on society, the security
2 aspect that that will have on society is the
3 type of investments that -- I'm 31 years old.
4 Those are the types of investments -- when
5 we're printing this much money, these are the
6 investments that we have to make. These are
7 assets that are going to pay off, and it is
8 going to create immense value. Because that
9 next generation that is going to come
10 through, they're not going to have to worry
11 about energy if we do these things. And that
12 is one of the most profound ideas I've ever
13 heard.

14 So, yeah, my name's Greg. I'm from
15 Harvey Woods. You know, having been around
16 for too long, COVID-19, definitely tough.
17 But you know what? We are in probably one of
18 the most important industries out there. No
19 energy, this Zoom call never happens. And so
20 making sure that we can protect that with
21 solar energy, and maybe take a little bit of
22 a different spin on how we view developing
23 regulatory policies, how we work together in
24 a competitive environment, how we work

1 together in creating standardizations and
2 protocols like we see in Silicone Valley, we
3 do that for energy. And I think that New
4 Hampshire is uniquely positioned to take on
5 that endeavor.

6 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Thank you, Mr.
7 Dubela.

8 MR. DUBELA: No problem.

9 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Commissioner
10 Bailey, do you have questions?

11 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: Yes, thank
12 you. Just one quick question.

13 Thank you for your comments, and
14 thank you for your concrete ideas on what we
15 can do to help.

16 MR. DUBELA: No problem.

17 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: Can you tell
18 me, are you working with the Legislature to
19 create a more competitive REC program?
20 Because that's not something in our
21 jurisdiction. I'm sure you understand that;
22 right?

23 MR. DUBELA: So I am not
24 actively -- to be honest, what I'm most

1 concerned about right now is the first job
2 that I was able to do, I was able to create a
3 job for myself, a job for my engineer, a job
4 for his deck hand, and a job for our master
5 electrician. And just given the global
6 environment right now, my No. 1 concern -- I
7 did all of my development and preparing for
8 all this stuff, I did that when we were
9 locked down. Right now, I don't think that,
10 from my company's standpoint, it's an
11 appropriate investment. I think that I need
12 to more focus on being a reliable source of
13 income for my teammates before I try to take
14 on something that is obviously going to be a
15 multi-year thing. Like I said, this is my
16 first time speaking at a Commission. This is
17 the first time that I've kind of opened up
18 the floodgate on some unique things that I've
19 been working on and ideas. And I think
20 that's a good place to start. But for right
21 now, my primary concern is making sure that
22 people have work.

23 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: Okay. Thank
24 you very much.

1 MR. DUBELA: No problem.

2 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Mr. Dubela, I
3 don't really have too many questions. But I
4 was impressed by your comments about sort of
5 bringing solar together to resolve some of
6 the inefficiencies that might exist in the
7 industry. We can certainly consider your
8 comments and look at what we can do here.
9 But I wondered if you had tried to do
10 something along those lines yourself with the
11 industry, other industry stakeholders.

12 MR. DUBELA: What would that look
13 like?

14 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: No. I just
15 wondered if you had tried to do that and it
16 was well received or if you hadn't tried yet
17 or what --

18 MR. DUBELA: I haven't tried yet,
19 mainly because a pandemic wasn't necessarily
20 happening. But now, with COVID-19, I'm
21 trying to view things in as collaborative of
22 a way as possible and to just keep thinking
23 of ways that my industry can help solve the
24 issues.

1 In terms of like what that would
2 look like, I mean, Ms. Martin [sic] came in
3 with excellent data with the Synapse report.
4 Mr. Weeks came in with a fantastic insight
5 into commercial development in the Northeast,
6 providing a lot of contrast from state by
7 state. This helps regulatory agencies look
8 at how to kind of create a path. Mr. Kilens
9 is -- you know, he's a UNH local guy. Having
10 local people involved creates movements,
11 having his perspective on things. And Mr.
12 Catania has, you know, financing experience,
13 which is the No. 1 thing if we're going to
14 do, like, really large-scale projects. So in
15 this room alone, I think we have knowledge
16 capital to make it where we identify what are
17 we trying to do with the COVID-19 emergency
18 plan. We're trying to help the most
19 disenfranchised, the people who are looking
20 at disadvantages that, you know, they need
21 help with, and then we bring in a multitude
22 of minds to attack that problem from their
23 own unique domain. And you let collaboration
24 happen and innovation happen on top of that,

1 and what ends up happening is, in terms of
2 teams, you end up getting not only a really
3 optimized solution, but it tends to be cheap.
4 And I'm not trying to raise people's taxes.
5 I'm from New Hampshire.

6 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Well,
7 thank you very much for your presentation.
8 That was very helpful.

9 MR. DUBELA: Thank you, Chairwoman.

10 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Mr.
11 Froling.

12 MR. FROLING: Can everybody hear
13 me? Well, my name is Mark Froling. I own
14 and operate a small biomass energy company.
15 So we are on the thermal side, not the
16 electric side of things. And the Public
17 Utility Commission has been a great friend to
18 our industry. You guys have helped us grow
19 this biomass energy field tremendously over
20 the last ten years, with help through three
21 different programs, residential, commercial
22 rebate programs, as well as competitive
23 grants as well. Also, you guys are involved
24 in the Renewable Energy Certificate under

1 that program as well, and so you guys have
2 been tremendously helpful. In fact, since
3 2004 I've been in business here. We have
4 had -- and your program came in later. But
5 since your program has come in, we've only
6 done, in fact, two projects without the help
7 of the Public Utility Commission. And I
8 don't think we would be in business unless
9 you guys were there because you are
10 tremendously helpful to make these
11 projects -- to sell the projects, as well as
12 to support the ongoing operation of these
13 projects through your grants and RECs. And
14 so thank you so much, over the years, to
15 provide that stability.

16 I want to dive right into the COVID
17 impact because that is really the intention
18 of this meeting. We are 90 percent
19 commercially involved and 10 percent
20 residentially involved. And the commercial
21 side includes 80 percent of -- the commercial
22 side is school-driven work,
23 municipality-driven work, where we are
24 working with school districts or individual

1 private schools as well. And also
2 municipalities or county institutions as
3 well. And since the COVID impact in March,
4 really, we have lost -- from March until now,
5 we have lost -- until today, we've lost
6 exactly 24 percent of our sales. So it has
7 had a really large impact on our company,
8 possibly during the worst possible time,
9 because we also made a very large investment
10 into this field. We had started two years
11 ago to develop a new facility in Keene, New
12 Hampshire, and it took us a year and a half
13 to do the engineering and the purchasing and
14 procurement and the development of this
15 project. And right as we went into the
16 physical construction of the project, after
17 all the purchasing and development was done,
18 COVID hit and things changed. Sales dropped
19 out. Schools were uncertain business. And
20 it's had a lot of impact on how we see things
21 now. Now, it's not all bad. But change is
22 difficult, and so we had to pivot. The
23 biggest impact is really the uncertainty of
24 things. It is not so much that -- the

1 24 percent in sales, of course, is a
2 tremendous hurdle. But it is the uncertainty
3 of is there going to be business in the
4 future or, you know, or, you know, will they
5 buy our wood chips in the future. The
6 uncertainty created by this COVID impact is
7 really our biggest hindrance right now, and
8 that is where I think the Utility Commission
9 can really help us the most to overcome that
10 uncertainty, because we are in a climate of a
11 tremendous uncertainty and unknowns. And so
12 having a steadfast hand on policy, on rebates
13 and programs and funding of these things
14 could actually help us tremendously sort of
15 levelize our effort in keeping steadfast to
16 help our potential customers make steadfast
17 decisions and move forward.

18 It's really a trifecta of things
19 that has happened for us. It can't always be
20 pinpointed to COVID because it could be
21 unrelated. We had falling fuel oil prices
22 beforehand, and that has a very large effect
23 on the heating side because people shift,
24 pivot to the lowest cost of fuel very

1 quickly. Typically within a year or two,
2 people pivot to the lowest-cost available
3 fuel. And so four years ago, when liquid
4 propane became extremely cheap, below a
5 dollar per MMBtu, a lot of people shifted to
6 that. And recently fuel oil has really
7 dropped down. And with COVID, businesses
8 have less certainty, and so the cost of oil
9 is probably going to stay quite low for some
10 time. So people are sort of firing up the
11 oil boilers again and going away from biomass
12 boilers that we of course are trying to sell.
13 Strangely, we're still at about a 40-percent
14 discount over oil. But with uncertainty,
15 people stick with what they have rather than
16 starting new projects.

17 To make things worse, our increase
18 in overall costs has gone up because of
19 additional work we have to do to be safe.
20 You know, there's additional cost in PPE, in
21 rental lifts. Because we can't have so many
22 people on the lifts, we have to have
23 individual lifts for each person now. So
24 even for the projects that we just finished

1 this year, the margins have gone way down
2 because of these additional costs.
3 Transportation costs because we don't want to
4 have so many hotel nights, so we're driving
5 back and forth. We have more transportation
6 because we don't want to have several drivers
7 in one van, things like that. So all of
8 these individual things have come back to --
9 have come together and created sort of the
10 perfect storm, not in the right direction,
11 unfortunately, and made this business quite
12 difficult when we were hoping to actually
13 turn things around a little bit.

14 I will say that a I'm huge fan of
15 the PUC because you guys are underwriting
16 every single project that we're doing. And
17 of course we utilize you guys on every single
18 project. And what I would hope to convey
19 today, even though business is hard and it
20 looks pretty uncertain for the near future,
21 is that you can really pay attention to
22 funding the current programs and keeping a
23 steadfast hand on the funding and these
24 programs rather than shifting things up and

1 down, because really the uncertainty of
2 things right now is so high, that if we have
3 uncertainty in the planning of things, that
4 could make things even more difficult.

5 So that is my message for today.
6 I'm obviously happy to answer any questions
7 that you guys might have as well.

8 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Thank you very
9 much, Mr. Froling.

10 Commissioner Bailey, do you have
11 questions?

12 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: No. Thank
13 you very much, Mr. Froling.

14 MR. FROLING: You're welcome.

15 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: I do have one
16 question. I think it probably applies to
17 everyone, but in particular to your industry.

18 Are you still -- I believe there's
19 been some issues with equipment impacted by
20 COVID and the ability to get the things you
21 need to do your projects. Is that still the
22 case, and do you think it's going to improve?

23 MR. FROLING: Well, yes, that's a
24 good question. So our lead times, we have a

1 lot of equipment coming from overseas. Even
2 though the fuel is local, most of the
3 expertise equipment is really, actually
4 European-driven at this point. And so we've
5 had much longer lead times for parts and
6 pieces to bring the projects together. That
7 has put a lot of stress on sort of the
8 financing of the projects because we might
9 have a -- in some cases right now, we've had
10 six months' delivery times from, you know,
11 purchase to a boiler seen on site. So we've
12 seen extended situations there. Parts and
13 pieces from companies that are in a lockdown
14 right now, especially I know specifically on
15 one boiler that is supposed to get parts from
16 Germany right now, and we're looking at four
17 months to get these parts. That'll certainly
18 put us out of the heating season. Yes, we do
19 have a backup boiler there. That's not a
20 problem. But those are additional stresses
21 that have been put upon us this year as well
22 caused by COVID.

23 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
24 you, Mr. Froling, for your comments today.

1 MR. FROLING: You're welcome.

2 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Morton
3 Bailey.

4 MR. BAILEY: Hello. Can you hear
5 me okay? Great. I'm Morton Bailey. My
6 company, Lyme Green Heat, is a wood pellet
7 fuel company. We basically sell and install
8 fully automated wood pellet heating systems
9 that utilize bulk wood pellet storage. And
10 then we have a fleet of delivery trucks
11 delivering wood pellets out, just like oil is
12 delivered. So we literally take a truck and
13 hook a hose up to a bin in someone's
14 basement, or to a silo outside in commercial
15 applications, and blow those wood pellets in.
16 So we act very similar to your traditional
17 heating oil company.

18 I employ ten individuals between
19 heating systems, service and installation,
20 and the delivery of wood pellets. The
21 COVID-19 crisis has -- we've seen the impact
22 largely in the springtime with the initial --
23 or late winter with the initial shutdown.

24 One big impact that we saw from

1 that was the closure of all industry trade
2 shows, home shows, those typical
3 springtime/late winter events that allow us
4 to get into the public, meet with contractors
5 and homeowners who are looking to do new
6 building projects and update their home
7 infrastructure. That is a very common place
8 for us to do business. We found all those
9 shows shut down. So of course that created a
10 barrier to our initial lead funnel coming
11 into the summer. We were fortunate to have a
12 good book of work from 2019 feeding into
13 2020, so we were able to stay busy, keep our
14 staff employed. We had no period where we
15 could not go out and continue to bring in
16 some revenue and keep our business going.

17 We saw a fairly large impact on our
18 trucking end of our business. Our heating
19 fuel season continued as normal, but in the
20 off-season we have to kind of find trucking
21 work for our driver staff. So it's anything
22 from hauling, you know, flatbed commodities
23 to running dump trailers behind our trucks to
24 construction sites. We saw that business

1 come into it very slowly from the spring to
2 the summer, particularly at the construction
3 end of things. It was just a very slow
4 start. So we weathered okay.

5 My biggest concern is actually
6 2021. I think we're going to see, from our
7 business standpoint, the larger impact in Q1,
8 Q2 of 2021 just due to the fact that our
9 sales development got cut short last year.
10 And then, of course, coming in to when
11 schools go back in session and everybody
12 started to kind of contract a little bit,
13 stay home, stay isolated, that's where we saw
14 our sales leads start to drop again as we
15 kind of came back into the winter season.

16 So from our perspective, what we're
17 really looking to see from the Public
18 Utilities Commission is a continuation of the
19 rebate program that we've had going for
20 several years, as Mr. Froling had mentioned.
21 The PUC has been a good friend to the
22 wood-heating industry in New Hampshire. We
23 have benefitted greatly from your ability to
24 create these rate base programs and

1 administer those in a very timely fashion.
2 We did find some lack of clarity this fall
3 with some legislative changes that impacted
4 the PUC's ability to process new applications
5 and send out rebate funds this fall, and we
6 did see an impact in business from that.

7 From a heating system standpoint,
8 installation, kind of your World Series of
9 the year is from September through November.
10 And that became a very challenging time,
11 having some uncertainty on what our rebate
12 programs would look like.

13 So what we would really love to see
14 is just a general continuation of the funding
15 levels that the PUC has had for fully
16 automated wood pellet boilers for residential
17 and commercial use. So, both the commercial
18 and residential programs. We feel that wood
19 energy in New Hampshire is a job creator.
20 It's a job driver. So as I think you all
21 know, 80 cents on the dollar for heating fuel
22 in New Hampshire typically goes outside the
23 state, where with wood fuels we're keeping
24 the majority of that money within the state.

1 And we're seeing, you know, the trickle-down
2 effect from the end user to the fuel delivery
3 company, to the transportation company, to
4 the forester, the logger and the landowner.
5 So we see our industry as an important part
6 of New Hampshire's forest industry, which is
7 a major part of our economy here in the state
8 of GDP. So we're really hoping to see some
9 consistency.

10 Again, speaking to other's points
11 of having these programs in place,
12 specifically rebate programs here for us in
13 the biomass industry, having those in place
14 and firm and cemented is extremely important
15 for our sales leads. A homeowner in New
16 Hampshire has somewhat become accustomed to
17 seeing these rebates. When we see a
18 short-term drop-out like we saw this fall, we
19 can lose people's attention pretty quickly.
20 So having that rebate there consistently,
21 knowing that the funding is going to be back,
22 is hugely important for us.

23 And I think coming into 2021, year
24 2021 is when we need that security almost

1 more than any other time. As Mr. Froling
2 mentioned, oil prices have continued to
3 decline. We're hoping to see that come back
4 up again. But we need to create that
5 certainty within the market in order to
6 continue to grow, add employees and
7 community -- support our community partners
8 from the forest industry. So that's kind of
9 where we're looking to see things. As I
10 said, we didn't see direct major impacts in
11 year 2020 from COVID-19. I just think we're
12 going to see the lingering effects. And
13 that's where, you know, strong businesses
14 creating jobs are going to be essential to
15 keeping our economy moving well.

16 So that's kind of my comments. I
17 totally appreciate you guys having all of us
18 come in and talk about this, and glad to
19 answer any questions.

20 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
21 you, Mr. Bailey.

22 Commissioner Bailey, any questions?

23 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: No. Thank
24 you, Mr. Bailey.

1 MR. BAILEY: Thank you.

2 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: I do have one
3 question. The source of your pellets, is it
4 primarily New Hampshire?

5 MR. BAILEY: That's correct. Our
6 pellets are sourced from New England Wood
7 Pellets in Jaffrey, New Hampshire.

8 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. Thank
9 you.

10 And I did want to say, for you and
11 everyone else, this has been incredibly
12 helpful to hear from you about rebate
13 programs, how those function in your
14 business. I found that very, very helpful.
15 So thank you.

16 MR. BAILEY: Thank you so much.

17 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. So
18 Commission Staff, were you planning on
19 speaking today? Mr. Wiesner? Ms. Cramton?

20 MR. WIESNER: I don't think we had
21 any prepared remarks or particular agenda,
22 unless Ms. Cramton disagrees with that. Not
23 sure we're prepared to respond to what we've
24 heard this morning.

1 I do want to express our
2 appreciation as well for the wide-ranging
3 comments that we've heard today from
4 different industry sectors of this important
5 industry. It's given us a lot to think
6 about. I will note that some of the issues
7 we've raised today are going to be considered
8 in other dockets, such as grid mod, EERS, the
9 electric vehicle time of use rate docket, and
10 of course net metering. And we still have an
11 open and active docket to consider net
12 metering, 16-576. And certain issues like
13 the value of solar, net metering compensation
14 levels, the threshold demarcation between
15 large and small customer-generators, all of
16 those will be actively considered and
17 probably actively litigated within the next
18 year to year and a half. So I just wanted to
19 state that for the record.

20 I also want to say that some folks
21 couldn't join us this morning, and I think we
22 would have heard more from the thermal side
23 of the industry if those folks had been able
24 to join us. So we do recommend there be an

1 opportunity for written comments to be
2 submitted within say the next two weeks. And
3 if we were to set a target date of
4 January 22nd, I think that would provide
5 people with a reasonable opportunity to
6 submit further written input for this docket.

7 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Great. I think
8 that's a really good suggestion. So let's go
9 with that. If anyone would like to submit
10 comments by January 22nd, that would be good.
11 And if you have comments that were written
12 from your presentations today that you would
13 like to submit that's great, too.

14 I wanted to -- before we close,
15 Mr. Weeks had put a few things in the chat.
16 And I don't know. Mr. Weeks, are you still
17 here?

18 [No verbal response]

19 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: Okay. I was
20 going to give him an opportunity to put those
21 into the record. I think he's gone. He can
22 submit those in his written comments if he'd
23 like.

24 Okay. Does anybody else need to be

1 heard?

2 Commissioner Bailey, anything?

3 [Commissioner Bailey indicating in the
4 negative.]

5 CHAIRWOMAN MARTIN: All right.

6 Well, thank you, everyone, so much for your
7 comments and time today. It was really
8 educational and helpful. And if we have
9 nothing else today, we will adjourn. Thank
10 you. Have a good day.

11 COMMISSIONER BAILEY: Thank you,
12 everyone.

13 (Whereupon the hearing was adjourned at
14 11:15 a.m.)

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