

## **Low Income Solar Act of 2015**

*Original Sponsor: Senators Sanders*

The cost of solar power has plummeted in recent years, and as a result there are now 21.3 gigawatts of installed solar capacity in the U.S. – enough to power 4.3 million homes. However, many low-income families who would benefit the most from a reduction in their electricity bills are not taking advantage of this affordable, sustainable energy source because of a combined lack of access to financing options, and living under a roof that cannot support a solar panel.

For homeowners with suitable roofs this legislation would provide grants to help reduce the upfront costs of installing solar panels. For renters or families unable to install solar on their roofs the bill provides loans to solar developers to connect low-income families to solar either physically, or virtually through the construction of community solar facilities. In all cases this bill encourages job training to local communities.

The Low Income Solar Act (LISA) would establish a loan and grant program through the Department of Energy that would:

- Grant money for part of the upfront cost of a residential solar array for low income families owning their home;
- Loan money for organizations that find ways to provide access to community solar facilities to low-income families through local efforts;
- Incentivize the construction of community solar facilities that act as “virtual” solar roof panels for low-income families who cannot install directly on their own roofs by reserving program funds for community projects that leave savings with families;
- Focus on supporting programs that aim to fulfill the need for solar in geographical areas that have little or no solar deployment;
- Promote diversity in the workforce by prioritizing loans for woman- and minority-owned small businesses;
- Require that loans are paid back with mechanisms that maximize the financial benefit to families; and
- Set aside a portion of funds for developing solar economies in Appalachia, Indian tribal lands, and Alaskan native communities.

LISA also aims to address several of the other barriers to widespread adoption of solar power in communities that need it the most, by providing funding for solar workforce training and development. It would also provide support to organizations that help to advance policies in state and local governments that in turn improve low-income resident access to solar.