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Vermont House Passes Modernized Renewable Energy Standard

Montpelier, VT – Today, the Vermont House of Representatives passed H.289, to modernize Vermont’s Renewable Energy Standard. The bill would put Vermont on track to achieve 100% renewable electricity across all the state’s utilities by 2035, which would make Vermont only the second state to meet that critical benchmark, and would significantly increase the requirements for Vermont utilities to support the deployment of new renewable energy. The bill will now head to the Senate for consideration.

If enacted, H.289 would be the first major update to the Renewable Energy Standard since its enactment in 2015. In terms of cutting carbon pollution, this bill will be the equivalent of taking approximately 160,000-250,000 cars off the road, for good. This bill represents the largest single move towards renewable electricity and away from fossil fueled power that Vermont has ever taken, by a wide margin.

"Vermonters have made clear over and over again that addressing the climate crisis must be a priority, and that the status quo is simply unacceptable," said Ben Edgerly Walsh, Climate and Energy Program Director for VPIRG. "The incredibly strong vote for this bill is yet another sign that Vermont legislators have heard that message loud and clear. We deeply appreciate all the hard work Vermont representatives have done to make this bill a reality."

Peter Sterling, Executive Director of Renewable Energy Vermont, stated "Today’s vote was a big victory and reflects the hard work and commitment of Speaker of the House Jill Krowinski in the fight against climate change. Without her leadership, we wouldn’t have been able to bring together the environmental groups, low income advocates, utilities and others who supported this bill."

H.289 would:

- Double the amount of new renewables Vermont utilities are required to build in the state – in particular small and medium-sized renewables – from 10% to 20% of the electricity they deliver. This is expected to be met mostly with new solar.
- Create a new requirement for Vermont utilities to provide their customers with additional, new renewable energy of any size from anywhere in the region. This requirement is over and above the in-state requirement described above – an additional 20% by 2035 for Green Mountain Power, and an additional 10% by 2035 for Vermont’s other utilities.
- Require all Vermont utilities to provide 100% renewable electricity to their customers – by 2030 for Green Mountain Power and Vermont Electric Coop, and by 2035 for other utilities that are not already at 100% renewable.

“VNRC deeply appreciates the leadership of House members who voted today to ensure that Vermont curates the most clean grid possible, as more Vermonters lean into electricity for heating, transportation and power needs,” said Johanna Miller, Energy & Climate Program Director at Vermont Natural Resources Council. “On the heels of yet another record-breaking warm year, this foundation is essential to ensure Vermont does its part to cut planet-warming pollution while also saving Vermonters significantly over time with far more efficient energy resources.”

The bill also phases out offsite or “virtual” net metering – a program that had potential to be a scalable opportunity for all Vermonters to participate in community solar but unfortunately never fully lived up to that potential – while requiring an analysis and recommendations on a “successor program” to offsite group net metering that surpasses current or future options available to Vermonters who are currently unable to install solar on their properties.

Other important changes in the bill are:

- Essentially making all electricity from new biomass plants ineligible to meet the Renewable Energy Standard’s requirements.
- Preventing power from any newly flooded lands by Hydro Quebec from being considered a new renewable.
- Changing from a “one size fits all” requirement for utilities to renewable requirements tailored to the individual needs of Vermont’s smaller rural co-ops and municipal utilities in order to help control costs for ratepayers.

Vanessa Rule, Co-Director and Lead Organizer of 350VT, shared, “Community conversations across the state and the ensuing grassroots support for this bill show that many Vermonters want truly clean and just electricity. In addition to new in-state renewables, they support a more effective community solar program, good siting, and ratepayer protection. They are heartened to see elected leaders prioritizing this.”

“Reforming Vermont’s RES is the lynchpin to the state’s ability to reduce carbon pollution. As more people transition to electric vehicles and heat pumps, we will need to build more clean, renewable electricity sources,” said CLF Vice President Elena Mihaly. “RES reform is a critical step in planning for a clean future. We applaud the House members who voted favorably today to bring us towards that clean energy future.”

Lauren Hierl, Executive Director of Vermont Conservation Voters, added, “With Vermonters still reeling from recent flooding and other climate disasters, we’re so grateful the Vermont House is advancing one of the most ambitious renewable energy standards in the country. This bill is an important step in Vermont’s efforts to cut climate pollution and leave a better Vermont for future generations.”

"This bill results from a positive and unifying collaboration between Vermont’s utilities and environmental advocates. The Sierra Club appreciates the Legislature's work to establish the working group last year that helped produce this agreed-upon reform. We look forward to advancing this important policy with the Senate and truly move forward to 100% clean renewable power," states Robb Kidd, Vermont Sierra Club Conservation Program Manager.

Our organizations look forward to working alongside lawmakers in the Senate to help advance comprehensive modernization of our Renewable Energy Standard so that we can put our state on a path to delivering more new, local and accessible renewable energy to all Vermonters.