



## **Solar Washington statement supporting utilities that choose to withdraw from the Washington State Renewable Energy System Incentive Program**

*November 21, 2019*

*Since 2005 Solar Washington has seen two incentive programs transform and grow the solar market in Washington State: The Washington State Renewable Energy Cost Recovery Incentive Program 2005-October 2017, and the revamped Renewable Energy System Incentive Program since October 2017. Both incentive programs were very popular, reaching their state funding limits before the end of their term. Utilities signed on to administer these incentive programs voluntarily.*

*Eligibility for state incentive payments is determined by the WSU Energy Program through an application and certification process. Per state law, WSU Energy Program must cease to issue certifications for the program when doing so would cause total program payments to exceed \$110 Million. WSU has reported that by mid-2019 the full \$110 Million dollar program budget had been committed (nearly 2.5 years earlier than anticipated by legislation).*

*However, law also guides the WSU Energy Program to maintain the participant application process through June of 2021. With no available funding, the program is still technically open. Those with newly installed solar systems can apply to get on a waitlist, which has created confusion and concerns for solar advocates, consumers, and reputable solar installers in Washington.*

*Without offering certainty, the program is at best an after-the-fact reward to some who adopt solar, rather than incentive to make an informed purchase. Worse still, Solar Washington is troubled by reports of companies misleading customers into investments based on the false likelihood of qualifying for future state incentive payments.*

*While the State is unable to formally close the program, the law does allow for utilities, that voluntarily administer annual incentive payments to their participating customers, to withdraw their participation. In doing so, a utility would maintain all obligations to administer annual payments to existing program participants, but would direct the WSU Energy Program to cease accepting new applications from customers in their service territory.*

***Solar Washington supports utilities that choose to withdraw from the Washington State Renewable Energy System Incentive Program. We do this in the interest of consumer protection.***

*If at a later date, the WSU Energy Program finds that state incentive funding has been "left on the table," Solar Washington would encourage policy makers to consider ways to direct the funds to solar projects that benefit low income and vulnerable populations in ways not accomplished by the previous incentive programs.*

## Frequently Asked Questions

***Q: Why does Solar Washington support utilities ending their participation in the state incentive program?***

A: Solar Washington supports policies that encourage the use, adoption and growth of solar energy. In order to drive solar adoption, an incentive program must provide transparency and certainty. Washington's Renewable Energy System Incentive Program no longer does this. Instead, a program that remains "open" to applications even though its funding is already fully committed creates disadvantages for honest solar companies and leaves consumers vulnerable to being misled. A utility's choice to withdraw from the program ends the ambiguity for their customers, providing a consistent message and level playing field for solar sales. This choice is not anti-solar and does not take opportunities away from solar customers.

***Q: What happens to the utility's customers or Community Solar Project Administrators who have already applied to the state incentive program or who purchase a property with a system that was certified already?***

A: Nothing changes if you have already applied, been certified as eligible, or purchase a property that was previously certified as eligible for the state incentive program. Utilities are still 100% obligated to work with the WSU Energy Program to administer annual incentive payments to their participating customers. This is also true for Community Solar Projects that have applied and/or have been pre-certified for eligibility by the WSU Energy Program. The state funding for pre-certified Community Solar Projects is already committed, so these projects under development are able to offer state incentives as part of the benefit to members/subscribers.

***Q: My utility did not close their program and I heard from a contractor that incentives will be available again in 2020. How do I know what to believe?***

A: Always contact multiple installers and get multiple bids. Your utility may have a preferred contractor list or you can find many reputable solar installers through Solar Installers of Washington.

***Q: Is now still a good time to go solar?***

A: Yes, the state renewable energy incentive programs did a great job getting the solar market into a strong position in Washington. Consumers now benefit from reduced pricing, state sales tax exemption, federal investment tax credits and net metering.