

May 13, 2022

Representative Mohamud Noor
Chair, Jobs Omnibus Conference Committee
Minnesota State Capitol
75 Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Noor and members of the Jobs Omnibus Conference Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on S.F. 4091, the Omnibus jobs, energy and commerce, policy and finance bill.

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) is a national science advocacy organization with 50 years of experience putting science into action to build a healthier planet, a safer world, and a more equitable society. On behalf of our half-million members and supporters, including over 7,000 across Minnesota, we work to advance science-based solutions to some of the world's most pressing problems.

The science is clear – limiting the adverse effects of climate change requires rapid reductions in emissions now. We have a limited window to pass the policies necessary to sharply reduce heat-trapping emissions over the next two decades, including significant investments in decarbonizing the power sector and electrifying sectors like transportation and buildings. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report underscored the need for bold policy to halve greenhouse gas by 2030 and stressed the urgent timeframe to limit global warming to 1.5°C (2.7°F), a threshold of safety for climate change.¹ A July 2021 UCS analysis found that cutting power sector emissions 80 percent below 2005 levels by 2030 would be a key tool in meeting these broader economy-wide reduction targets.² The power sector reductions were achieved by tripling renewable energy generation (primarily new wind and solar), phasing out coal generation, and drastically reducing gas generation.³

S.F. 4091 should set Minnesota on the path towards reaching levels of renewable energy needed to achieve science-based emission reduction targets. This moment requires historic investments in solar, energy storage, weatherization, electric vehicles, local climate action and clean energy transition, and more.

¹ <https://www.ucsusa.org/about/news/new-ipcc-report-finds-sharp-cuts-fossil-fuels-and-emissions-urgently-needed-policymakers>

² <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/clean-energy-transformation>

³ <https://blog.ucsusa.org/steve-clemmer/methane-madness-5-reasons-why-natural-gas-doesnt-belong-in-a-clean-electricity-payment-program/>

Minnesotans are already experiencing the climate crisis as well as health impacts from the burning of fossil fuels. According to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, air pollution in Minnesota disproportionately impacts low-income residents, uninsured residents, residents of color, and residents living with a disability.⁴ Communities across Minnesota facing climate impacts and air quality issues need ambitious leadership from this conference committee to invest in building a Minnesota that is healthier, more renewable, and more equitable.

UCS asks this Committee to prioritize policies that increase renewable energy, support environmental justice communities and a diverse clean energy workforce, improve access to clean energy and reducing energy burdens, and put us on a sensible path toward deep emission reductions and a more healthy, resilient, equitable Minnesota.

The policies and programs in the House version of the omnibus bill significantly invest in accelerating renewable energy, increasing distributed generation, and reducing reliance on fossil fuels. The more of that we do, the more economic and health benefits the state will see.

We want to highlight some of the key programs from H.F. 3337 and S.F. 3492 that should be included in S.F. 4091. Fully funding the following provisions would bring energy savings and clean energy jobs, reduce emissions, and improve health outcomes:

- **Support for solar:** Solar for Schools, Solar on Public Buildings, expanded solar rewards, and removing barriers to creating community solar gardens.
- **Support for energy storage systems:** Investing in solar energy paired with storage will facilitate a more resilient, renewable, and economic grid. Energy storage can reduce peak demand and reliance on fossil fuels, while helping integrate high levels of renewable energy reliably. Energy storage can also have important equity benefits: reducing emissions in environmental justice communities, providing cost savings, and increasing community resilience.⁵ Policies designed around community-centered outcomes and strong public engagement help ensure the benefits of energy storage are accessible to all Minnesotans, particularly low-income residents and Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color. The provisions on compensation for energy storage system owners engaging in demand response, assessments of energy storage in utility planning, and incentives for installing energy storage systems should be fully funded as in the House bill.
- **Residential Electric Panel Upgrade Grants**, which will enable broader access to the benefits of building electrification and remove a key obstacle to residential electric vehicle charging, as well as reducing reliance on fossil fuels for heating and cooking.⁶
- **Electric vehicle charging infrastructure** for County Government public parking facilities, parks, and highway rest areas.
- **Metro Transit bus electrification:** Investing in public transit and reducing emissions from buses will improve transportation equity and reduce particulate

⁴ <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/air/life-and-breath-report>

⁵ <https://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Ensure-Energy-Storage-Policies-Equitable-Brief.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.utilitydive.com/news/residential-electric-panels-represent-a-nearly-100b-roadblock-to-full-el/605829/>

matter air pollution from vehicles, which disproportionately impacts Black, Latinx, and low-income Minnesotans.⁷

- **Local Climate Action Planning and Community Energy Transition Grants** to support communities creating climate action plans and ensuring a just transition to clean energy.
- **Weatherization Assistance Program expansion**, a key measure to reduce the energy needed to power homes while also reducing energy burdens for low-income households.
- **Matching funds for the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act** to maximize Minnesota's opportunities to receive federal support on clean energy infrastructure investments ranging from electric vehicles to energy storage.

With strong policies and investments in renewable energy deployment, Minnesota can meet 100 percent of electricity demand with renewable energy from sources like wind and solar, even as demand increases from electric vehicles and electrifying buildings.

Together with [COPAL MN](#) and other partner organizations, UCS recently released a new study entitled *On the Road to 100 Percent Renewables*. The analysis focused on 24 members states of the U.S. Climate Alliance (USCA)—including Minnesota—and found that these states can meet 100 percent of their electricity consumption with renewable energy by 2035. This holds true even with strong increases in demand due to the electrification of transportation and heating. Our analysis also found tremendous benefits of achieving a high renewable electricity standard in Minnesota in terms of avoided public health costs and economic gains. Our Minnesota fact sheet is provided along with this comment letter and is also available [here](#). The full report is available [here](#).

The study and its findings support larger investments in renewable energy and equity in a few ways. First, a 100 percent renewable electricity standard is feasible and provides numerous benefits—Minnesota can and should be going all in to reach the state's potential for renewable electricity and unlock key health and economic benefits for Minnesotans. Given that our analysis shows meeting 100 percent of Minnesota's electricity demand with renewable energy is viable by 2035, it is critical for the legislature to act now to increase deployment of solar power, energy storage, and energy efficiency.

Additionally, our analysis found that achieving a 100 percent renewable electricity standard while restricting new fossil fuel construction delivered deeper emission reductions and more renewable energy growth—which would likely produce even stronger public health and economic benefits for Minnesotans in terms of clean energy jobs and labor income and avoided health costs of premature death, asthma attacks, and lost workdays from air pollution. To maximize clean energy jobs benefits and the public health cost savings of improved air quality, this Committee should prioritize policies that reduce reliance on fossil fuels, including provisions that support renewable energy and electrification.

Building towards a renewable energy future would deliver major health and economic benefits for Minnesota. Our analysis found that a 100 percent renewable electricity standard

⁷ <https://blog.ucsusa.org/cecilia-moura/who-breathes-dirtiest-air-from-vehicles-minnesota/>

in Minnesota would deliver \$1.2 billion dollars in public health cost savings and almost \$5 billion in net labor income by 2040.

Energy efficiency and energy storage investments are critical for reducing energy burdens. Our analysis examined the impact of renewable electricity standards on average energy burdens. In Minnesota, we found that *regardless* of the policy scenario, the average energy burden increases from 4.0 percent to either 4.6 in a “business as usual” scenario or 4.8 percent in the 100 percent RES scenario. While these results do not include savings from fuel switching through electrification of transportation and heating or more aggressive energy efficiency targets, research shows that energy burdens are disproportionately higher for low-income communities, and there are clear racial disparities in energy insecurity, disconnections, and access to efficiency and distributed solar.⁸ Increased programs for weatherization and solar paired with energy storage systems for low- and moderate-income households and Black, Latinx, Native, and other communities of color is key for ensuring energy affordability and reliability and reducing household energy bills.

Minnesota needs historic investments in a clean energy future to unlock the full potential of its benefits: improved public health, a more livable climate, a more resilient and equitable energy system, and new clean energy jobs. This Committee must be bold and proactive this session and pass an Omnibus package that truly lays the groundwork to reach an equitable carbon-free future and begins delivering the health and economic benefits of increased renewable energy to all Minnesotans.

Sincerely,

Meghan Hassett
Midwest Clean Energy Advocate
Union of Concerned Scientists

⁸ <https://energynews.us/2020/07/01/racial-disparities-persist-in-electric-service-is-willful-blindness-to-blame/>