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OFFICE OF PEOPLE'S COUNSEL**

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**BILL NO.:** Senate Bill 353  
**COMMITTEE:** Senate Finance  
**HEARING DATE:** February 17, 2015  
**SPONSOR:** Senator Hershey  
**POSITION:** Support

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Senate Bill 353 would require a solar installer who is negotiating a contract with a customer to do certain things before executing an installation contract with a customer. The installer first would be required to contact the customer's electric company to determine whether the company is accepting new interconnection agreements in the customer's property area. Second, the installer would then be required to notify the customer of the electric company's ability to accept new interconnection agreements in the customer's property area *before* a contract is executed. The bill also would require an electric company to provide information about the ability of a specific location on the distribution system to accept a new interconnection.

In large part due to the Renewable Portfolio Standard and net metering laws and consumer interest, residential solar installations have increased significantly in Maryland. While costs have come down significantly, these systems still represent a significant investment for consumers. As a result there is a growing recognition of the importance of more oversight and consumer education related to distributed generation systems, including rooftop solar installations.<sup>1</sup> In that regard, the Office of People's Counsel understands that Senate Bill 353 is

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates passed a resolution in June 2014 urging the coordination of legislative, regulatory and consumer protection initiatives to protect and educate distributed generation customers. See NASUCA Resolution 2014-5 at [www.nasuca.org](http://www.nasuca.org). See also "Solar Power for Your Home: A Consumer's Guide,"

intended to address a circumstance whereby a customer executes a contract for a solar installation, only to find out later that the installation cannot be done due to interconnection limitations in that portion of the electric company's service area. This can contribute to unnecessary consumer confusion and frustration. To avoid that, the bill's information and notice requirements would provide some measure of consumer information and protection to consumers interested in solar installations. OPC therefore supports the bill.