August 16, 2021

Name of legislator

Address

**RE: AB 1124 (Solar Energy Systems)**

**VOTE NO ON AB 1124**

Dear Name of Legislator,

As the local building official in the [your agency] I am urging you to vote NO on AB 1124 (Friedman). This bill would revise the definition of a “solar energy system” to include any structural design feature by eliminating the provision that it be a feature of a building. This bill would specify certain structural design features to be included in the definition, including elevated solar support structures regardless of whether the feature is on the ground or installed on a building. The revised definition would include solar carports and solar shade structures as well as other utility-grade solar energy system structures. As members of California Building Officials (CALBO), we have serious concerns about the life safety implications of revising the definition of these large-scale solar energy systems to include related structural elements.

As background, CALBO members are primarily responsible for enforcing building code requirements in an estimated 95% of the buildings constructed in California. Our mission is to promote public health and safety in building construction through responsible legislation, education, and building code development. We ensure that proper public health and structural safety requirements, codes, and standards are adhered to within the built environment. We protect the citizens and the overall safety of the public.

The major concern CALBO has with this bill is the changing of the definition of solar energy systems to include structural elements of large solar energy systems. It is contended that simple single family residential solar energy system installation has become standard in our industry. In fact, CALBO was an active participant to the Governor’s Solar Energy Guidebook which assists in the simplification and streamlining for single family solar energy systems. CALBO members assist daily in the streamlined permitting of residential solar energy systems in meeting California’s aspirational goals to address climate change. However, large solar energy systems should not be included in the same approach as single-family residential systems due to the variables of complex structural systems of large solar energy installations. An all-inclusive approach of solar energy systems to include structural elements of these systems will not allow building departments to verify the complex details of structural systems, deficient design, and installations that may lead to collapse of large solar energy systems. A reminder of the catastrophic potential of structural system failure is the recent collapse of the Surfside condominiums in Florida where the stark reminder is loss of lives and loss of property.

To be clear, I support California’s laudable goals relative to climate change and the promotion of green energy in the state. However, these efforts must be done feasibly and safely. In addition to the concerns of structural safety, there is a real financial implication to jurisdictions by changing the definition of these solar energy systems to include structural elements. Many California jurisdictions including the [your agency] would see significant economic loss if the fee caps for permitting were expanded to include structural systems of these large projects. These types of projects require several different safety checks including structural plan checks which can significantly increase the costs to building departments by thousands of dollars. As a result, some building departments are subsidizing these projects without successfully recovering the full costs of the labor and inspection costs associated with these systems. By allowing the revised definition, building departments will continue to lose money on the time and effort they put into safety inspections at a time where local government is already dealing with lower budgets due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For these reasons, I must join CALBO in respectfully asking for a **NO vote on AB 1124.**We look forward to a continued partnership with legislative leaders to address climate change and the use of solar energy systems in practical and prudent manners. However, the policy must have the highest regard for public safety and provide fiscally responsible solutions to building departments like ours and others across the state.

Sincerely,

[insert e-signature]

Your name

Title

Agency

Contact info (if you would like).