



**Testimony of
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New York State Legislature

Senate Finance Committee

Assembly Ways and Means Committee

2024-2025 Executive Budget Hearing

February 7, 2024

Good afternoon, Chair Krueger, Chair Weinstein, Members of the Senate Finance Committee, Assembly Ways and Means Committee, and other Members of the New York State Legislature. My name is Houtan Moaveni, and I am the Executive Director of the Office of Renewable Energy Siting (ORES or the Office). Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the important work and accomplishments of ORES during the past year, and the matters the Office expects to focus on during State Fiscal Year 2024-2025.

To begin, I would like to thank Governor Kathy Hochul for continuing to make combatting climate change a priority of her administration. Also, I would like to recognize staff at ORES and our State partner agencies for their dedication to New York's renewable energy mission and the protection of the State's environment. In April 2020, the Legislature squarely confronted the State's need for a coordinated and timely permitting process for major renewable energy facilities needed to meet the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) by creating ORES, which is the first state agency in the United States solely devoted to the siting of major renewable energy facilities.

Since its creation, ORES has developed and implemented a fact-based decision-making process that stands as a national model to efficiently and effectively enable a clean energy transition, while protecting environmental and community resources. Under Governor Hochul's continued leadership and through the diligence and dedication of our outstanding staff, ORES has met or exceeded all its statutory deadlines.

I am pleased to report the following to the Members of the New York State Legislature regarding the Office's performance and implementation of the Executive Law § 94-c as measured through the metrics of scale, speed, and quality of environmental review.

With respect to the scale of permitted major renewable energy facilities in the State, the Office began working with prospective applicants on all new applications for major renewable energy facilities from the Executive Law § 94-c's effective date. To date, the Office has issued fifteen (15) final siting permits, totaling over 2.3 gigawatts (GW) of renewable energy capacity:

- Riverhead Solar 2 (36 MW in Town of Riverhead, Suffolk County)
- Morris Ridge Solar Energy Center (177 MW in Town of Mount Morris, Livingston County)
- Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center (50 MW in Town of Dix, Schuyler County)
- Heritage Wind Facility (up to 185 MW in Town of Barre, Orleans County)
- Hecate Energy Cider Solar LLC (500 MW in Towns of Elba and Oakfield, Genesee County)
- Greens Corners Solar (120 MW in the Towns of Hounsfield and Watertown, Jefferson County)
- Hemlock Ridge Solar (200 MW in the Towns of Barre and Shelby, Orleans County)
- Horseshoe Solar (180 MW in the Town of Caledonia, Livingston County and the Town of Rush, Monroe County)
- Homer Solar (90 MW in the Towns of Homer, Cortlandville, and Solon, Cortland County)
- Riverside Solar (100 MW in the Towns of Lyme and Brownville, Jefferson County)

- Tracy Solar (119 MW in the Towns of Orleans and Clayton, Jefferson County)
- Bear Ridge Solar (100 MW in the Towns of Cambria and Pendleton, Niagara County)
- South Ripley Solar Project (270 MW in Town of Ripley, Chautauqua County)
- Moraine Solar (94 MW in the Town of Burns, Allegany County)
- Brookside Solar (100MW in the Towns of Chateaugay and Burke, Franklin County)

To put this in perspective, ORES has permitted more projects in just under three (3) years than the prior State siting process approved in over nine (9) years. Regarding speed, a majority of the fifteen (15) permitted facilities were approved less than eight (8) months from the date on which applications were deemed complete, marking the most rapid pace of major renewable energy facility approvals in the State's history.

While the scale and speed of the siting process are essential to meet the goals of the CLCPA, we cannot address climate change at the expense of our natural resources or communities. In making its final decisions, the Office must consider a variety of interests and must balance competing impacts to multiple resources of local and Statewide concern, with the State's need for major renewable energy facilities and the environmental benefits that they provide. Those benefits extend to agriculture resources and ecosystems, which are already being adversely affected by climate shifts and extreme weather.

When we think about the State's clean energy transition, it comes with a strong commitment to getting it right. Far from a rubber stamp, the Executive Law § 94-c process provides for a coordinated review of proposed major renewable energy facilities on a case-by-case basis, without compromising the integrity of environmental standards or sacrificing community engagement. As demonstrated by the final siting permits issued to date, the Office conducts detailed, transparent, site- and project-specific environmental review, with robust public participation, to ensure that the proposed facilities meet or exceed the requirements of Executive Law § 94-c and its implementing regulations.

ORES record of decisions confirm that local governments and community stakeholders have fairly and meaningfully participated in the permitting proceedings and their concerns have been incorporated into the final decisions. For a majority of the permitted facilities, host municipalities, applicants, and the Office staff took a cooperative approach that resolved local concerns without the need for full administrative hearing procedures. Through intervenor funding, local agencies and community groups had access to over \$2.3 million to facilitate their participation in the permitting process. For the fifteen (15) permitted facilities, the Office considered over 2,000 public and municipal comments and held 24 in-person and virtual public comment hearings.

With the objective to leave the host communities stronger than they were before these projects were developed, these facilities are expected to provide over \$280 million of benefits to the host communities over their lifetimes. Further, these facilities are expected to create more than 3,500 full-time equivalent jobs during construction and operation. As these projects proceed, ORES will continue to work collaboratively with the host municipalities and community stakeholders throughout the construction phase.

The Office expects significant application activity to continue in Fiscal Year 2024-25. The 2024-25 Executive Budget proposes \$26 million in new appropriation authority to support the Office and its work. The \$26 million is needed to ensure ORES has adequate resources to accomplish its mission and to continue to advance renewable energy development in New York State.

As part of the comprehensive agenda within the Executive Budget, the Governor has introduced the Renewable Action through Project Interconnection and Deployment (RAPID) Act. This proposal consolidates the environmental review and permitting of major renewable energy as well as electric transmission facilities into a single forum in which ORES will conduct a coordinated and timely review of these facilities needed to advance the CLCPA goals. The RAPID Act will modernize the permitting process for transmission facilities by incorporating the best practices established by the State's prior siting and permitting processes.

Under the leadership of Governor Hochul, ORES stands ready to help the State deliver clean, reliable, and affordable energy for all New Yorkers. The State is at the forefront of a successful and equitable clean energy transition, which requires a significant buildout of wind and solar facilities. Connecting these facilities to the grid requires a larger and more robust electric transmission infrastructure to link generators to where the electricity is needed. This transformation is dependent on responsible siting of these facilities. Over the past four years, ORES has demonstrated that it is possible to streamline and expedite permitting approvals for major renewable energy facilities without compromising on community or environmental protections. We have the team, the experience, and the expertise to urgently accelerate the build-out of much-needed transmission infrastructure through the RAPID Act.

I want to thank you for your crucial partnership in supporting the Office as we work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, protect our natural resources, and provide lasting economic development opportunities for the State. We look forward to continuing to work hand-in-hand with all stakeholders as these facilities are developed and constructed.

Dated: February 7, 2024
Albany, New York