



March 23, 2021

The Honorable Mike McGuire
Chair, Senate Governance and Finance Committee
State Capitol Building, Room 408
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: **SB 617 (Wiener) Residential Solar Energy Systems: Permitting.**
Notice of OPPOSE *(As Amended 03/18/21)*

Dear Senator McGuire,

The League of California Cities (Cal Cities) must respectfully **oppose** SB 617 (Wiener), which would, among other things, require local governments to implement an online automated permitting platform that verifies code compliance and instantaneously issues permits for solar and solar-plus-storage systems.

California cities are critical partners with the state in achieving our shared climate change, emission reduction, and clean energy goals, including supporting access to renewable energy resources, such as residential solar. However, we do not believe that the potentially costly and technologically advanced solar permit and inspection requirements as mandated in SB 617 are the right approach.

Under SB 617, cities over 10,000 population would be required to implement an online automated permitting platform that instantaneously issues permits for solar and storage systems by 2023. This requirement is extremely troubling and will pose both technical and fiscal challenges for cities to implement. SB 617 creates ambiguity by failing to define how permits would be issued "instantaneously." It is also unclear how SB 617 would align with existing law, which already streamlines the solar permitting process. While the bill encourages cities to adopt the SolarAPP+ created by the Federal Government, in order to ensure compliance with the law, cities may need to develop their own online permitting systems. Some cities have successfully moved from paper to online permitting for solar projects, including some cities that have adopted the use of the SolarAPP+. However, other cities may not have the staff expertise or financial means to do so, especially by the required deadlines.

Additionally, SB 617 could pose a risk to public safety by requiring local governments to include a virtual inspection option for these systems via live video, recording, or photos. During the pandemic, some cities have offered a video inspection option out of necessity and public health concerns. However, requiring this option in the future raises concerns over the thoroughness of the inspections. Cities want to find ways to make the solar permitting process efficient, but do not want to do so at the expense of inspection processes intended to protect public safety.

COVID-19 has decimated city budgets, and this is not the time to add new mandates to cities. SB 617, while well intentioned, would direct city resources away from pandemic recovery and immediately prioritize shifting to an online solar permitting system, when existing law already requires cities to have a streamlined solar permitting system.

For these reasons, Cal Cities **opposes** SB 617 (Wiener). If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me at (916) 658-8218.

Sincerely,



Derek Dolfie
Legislative Representative

cc: The Honorable Scott Wiener
Members, Senate Governance and Finance Committee
Anton Favorini-Csorba, Consultant, Senate Governance and Finance Committee
Ryan Eisberg, Consultant, Senate Republican Caucus