



S.4599 (STEWART-COUSINS, ET AL.)

Summary

This bill encourages the use of clean energy by expanding the products that may be purchased for public use to include renewable energy resources and setting the cost premium percentage for renewable energy products deemed reasonably competitive at 15 percent.

Explanation

Currently, New York's electricity market is dominated by nuclear and fossil-fuel electric power generators. Nuclear power plants place the public at risk of exposure to radiation from waste materials and are vulnerable to potentially devastating accidents. Fossil-fuel burning power plants spew a host of pollutants in our air, including: the sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides responsible for acid rain; mercury, a known toxin; and carbon dioxide, the primary greenhouse gas causing global warming. New York's abundant solar, wind and other renewable energy resources should be the basis the state's shift to cleaner, more reliable energy sources. This bill makes it possible for local governments to purchase electricity produced by clean renewable energy sources.

The New York's Public Service Commission is currently updating the state's renewable energy goal to ensure that 30 percent of the electricity sold in New York State by 2015 is generated by renewable sources. Local governments should be partners in meeting the state's clean energy goal. While the cost of some renewable energy technologies has fallen dramatically over the past decade, the retail price of electricity from wind and solar is still higher than that of electricity from dirty sources. Under existing law, local governments have an obligation to choose the cheapest product available, hampering their ability to choose renewable electricity.

This bill will make it possible for local governments to choose clean electricity at a limited additional cost. The measure also includes cost premiums for only renewable sources—not power from waste incinerators or nuclear plants, both of which are captured under the deeply flawed existing definition of renewables in state energy law. However, a better bill would further clarify its intent by explicitly barring electricity from such sources from being eligible for the price premium exception.

Environmental Advocates of New York supports this bill.

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