



ISACo News Release

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Statement from Executive Director Joe McCoy Regarding County Authority Under Illinois' Wind and Solar Siting Law

The recent controversy surrounding large-scale solar developments in Will County highlights a serious problem created by Illinois' current wind and solar siting law. Under existing state law, county boards are effectively required to approve wind and solar projects if the applicant satisfies the standards established by the State of Illinois. Yet, despite removing meaningful local discretion, the law still requires county boards to conduct hearings, deliberate publicly and ultimately cast difficult votes on projects that may generate significant opposition from residents of the county.

This framework places counties in an untenable position. County officials are being forced to serve as the public face of decisions that state law largely predetermines, while simultaneously exposing counties to litigation regardless of the outcome. Counties are therefore placed directly in the middle of highly contentious disputes without being afforded genuine authority to make final policy determinations.

The Will County proceedings demonstrate exactly why this structure is problematic. County Board members openly acknowledged during deliberations that recent changes in state law had substantially limited local discretion. Residents voiced concerns about the size, scope and long-term impacts of the project on farmland, wetlands, drainage, viewsheds and community character. At the same time, project supporters emphasized economic development, union jobs, tax revenue and energy reliability. Regardless of where one stands on the merits of a particular project, county boards should not be placed in a position where they are expected to absorb the political, legal and financial consequences of decisions that state law effectively dictates.

If the State of Illinois intends to establish uniform statewide standards for renewable energy siting that preempt local discretion, then the state should also reconsider whether counties should continue to bear responsibility for final approval votes that create litigation exposure and public frustration. Counties should either retain meaningful local authority over these decisions, or the state should assume a more direct role in the approval process. The current system creates confusion, undermines public confidence and places county governments in an unfair and legally vulnerable position.

The General Assembly is urged to address this issue and create a more reasonable, coherent and responsible process for wind and solar siting decisions.

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About ISACo

The Illinois State Association of Counties (ISACo) is a statewide organization representing county governments across Illinois, advocating for policies that strengthen local governance and improve services for residents.