

# Western Massachusetts Solar Forum

## Session 3: Solar Equity and Community Benefits

### Speaker Bios



#### **Chris Modlish**

**Assistant Attorney General  
Massachusetts Attorney General's Office**

Chris Modlish is an Assistant Attorney General in the Energy and Telecommunications Division of the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office. In this position, he represents Massachusetts ratepayers in a variety of proceedings before the Department of Public Utilities. This representation includes participating in the Department's investigations related to electric grid modernization and electric distribution company requests to build and own solar generation. Chris is also the lead on many of the Office's consumer protection and equity related efforts, including representing the Office in its investigations into the residential solar industry, and participating in Massachusetts Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program and Arrearage Management Payment meetings. Email: [chris.modlish@mass.gov](mailto:chris.modlish@mass.gov)



#### **Christine Crago**

**Associate Professor  
Department of Resource Economics, University of Massachusetts Amherst**

Christine L. Crago is an associate professor in the Department of Resource Economics and the Commonwealth Honors College at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her fields of research are energy and environmental economics. Her current research examines household decision making related to energy technologies, and income and racial disparities in power outage experiences and in adoption of renewable energy technologies. EMAIL: [CCRAGO@UMASS.EDU](mailto:CCRAGO@UMASS.EDU)

#### **Ernesto Cruz**

**Director of Community Organizing & Community Economic Development  
Co-op Power**



**Jo Comerford**  
**State Senator**  
**Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

## **Joanne Bissetta**

**Green Communities Division Director**  
**Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources**

Joanne Bissetta is the Director of the Green Communities Division at the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources. She started at DOER in 2009 as a Regional Coordinator, working directly with municipal officials and volunteers on Green Communities Designation and clean energy projects. She possesses over two decades of local and state government experience, having worked at MassDEP, the Town of Concord, and City of Cambridge. Joanne earned a BS in communications at Emerson College and a MA in Urban and Environmental Policy at Tufts University. When not working, you can find her in the garden, on her bike, or tending to her backyard chickens. Email: [joanne.bissetta@mass.gov](mailto:joanne.bissetta@mass.gov)



**Jon Abe**  
**CEO and Founder**  
**Sunwealth**

Jon is a renewable project developer, financier, and asset manager with deep commercial solar transaction experience. Previously, Jon was a Senior Vice President at Nexamp, where he served as the head of business development, asset management, and policy. At Nexamp, Jon supported the development and financing of more than 40 MW of commercial-scale solar projects. He was also General Manager of Nexamp Capital, which controlled a diverse portfolio of solar assets. Additionally, Jon worked for the Massachusetts Renewable Energy Trust where he developed and managed the \$68 million Commonwealth Solar program. Jon holds a BA from Cornell University. Email: [jon@sunwealth.com](mailto:jon@sunwealth.com)



**Kerry Bowie**  
**Founder, President, and Executive Director**  
**Browning the Green Space**

Kerry Bowie, General Partner at Malaika Ventures and Co-Founder/President/Executive Director of Browning the Green Space (BGS), brings 25 years of diverse experience in private, public, and nonprofit management. Kerry also serves as Managing Partner at Msaada Partners, a Boston-based consultancy focusing on social impact in communities of color, and co-founded the Majira Project to address diversity and resource disparities in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Kerry holds an MBA from MIT Sloan, an MSE in environmental engineering from the University of Michigan, and an SB in environmental engineering science from MIT. Email: [kerry@browningthegreenspace.org](mailto:kerry@browningthegreenspace.org)



**Lynn Benander**  
**President**  
**Co-op Power**

Lynn Benander is a community entrepreneur and activist working across the country with BIPOC led, multi-race groups to build energy cooperatives and large community owned solar projects that bring good jobs, energy savings, and wealth back to their communities. Email: [lynn@cooppower.coop](mailto:lynn@cooppower.coop)



**Maria Marasco**  
**Executive Director**  
**Cape & Vineyard Electric Cooperative, Inc.**

Maria manages a portfolio of 48 operational solar PV projects for CVEC's municipal members and participants. Her background as an attorney and businesswoman in both the public and private sectors support CVEC's expansion efforts in a changing renewable energy market.



**Nathan Phelps**  
**Managing Director, Vote Solar Regulatory Advocacy Hub**  
**Vote Solar**

Nathan joined Vote Solar in 2013 in order to advocate for a 100% clean energy future in regulatory venues. Prior to joining Vote Solar, Nathan was a Senior Economist at the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities with a primary focus on renewable energy and distributed generation.

## **Priya Gandbhir**

**Senior Attorney**

**Conservation Law Foundation Massachusetts**

Priya Gandbhir is a Senior Attorney in the Clean Energy and Climate Change program at Conservation Law Foundation, where she works in pursuit of a clean and just energy future by, in part, working collaboratively with local community groups, advocating and litigating before public utility commissions, and engaging with New England's regional independent electrical system operator, ISO-NE. Priya is a graduate of Wellesley College and received her J.D. and an LL.M. in Environmental Law from Vermont Law School. In her free time, Priya enjoys spending time with her friends and family, hiking with her dog Rey, and exploring New England's diverse and scenic parks and beaches. Email: [pgandbhir@clf.org](mailto:pgandbhir@clf.org)



## **Richard Kump**

**President and CEO**

**UMassFive College Credit Union**

Helped build a sustainability platform at UMassFive College Credit Union. From residential & commercial solar financing, to 0.00% Farm Share loans and socially responsible investment options, with lots in-between! UMassFive has financed over \$150 million in residential and small commercial solar projects over the past 7 years. Email: [rkump@umassfive.coop](mailto:rkump@umassfive.coop)



## **Samantha Hamilton**

**Live Well Springfield**

With over 19 years of working in the region, Samantha Hamilton manages the Live Well Springfield Coalition, where she leads initiatives to promote health equity through policy, systems, and environment change strategies. Samantha is the Coalition Building and Community Engagement Director at the Public Health Institute of Western Mass (PHIWM). In this position, she leads the Climate Change and Health Equity Initiative and the Trinity Health New England Transforming Community Initiative, which engages policy and advocacy to create strategies that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, address homelessness and housing, improve health outcomes for those of marginalized communities based in cities and towns directly impacted by climate change, and dismantle systemic racism. Email: [shamilton@publichealthwm.org](mailto:shamilton@publichealthwm.org)