2.29 Safe Siting for Battery Energy Storage Systems

Resolution passed 2026

Whereas, one of the purposes of Washington State PTA is to advocate for laws that further the education, physical and mental health, welfare, and safety of children and youth; and

Whereas, battery energy storage systems (BESS) are large-scale, grid-connected facilities that store electricity in lithium-ion batteries and are being proposed and sited with increasing frequency in Washington state, including in residential zones immediately adjacent to schools, childcare facilities, and other institutions serving children; and

Whereas, BESS incidents can result in thermal runaway, producing chemical fires that release toxins, notably hydrogen fluoride; and emergency response modeling for various emerging hazards typically uses a 175-pound adult as the exposure baseline, which does not account for children's smaller body mass, higher respiratory rates, and developing lungs and organ systems, with the result that current risk assessments may systematically underestimate the severity of toxic exposure for children in nearby schools and childcare settings; and

Whereas, BESS facilities in Washington state are permitted through a patchwork of local land use processes that vary by jurisdiction and apply no uniform siting standard, so that the safety protections afforded a school community depend on which county or city conducts the review rather than on any consistent statewide requirement; and

Whereas, schools are responsible for safety and evacuation planning children enrolled in public schools near BESS facility sites face uncertain and poorly documented risks; no statewide agency known to WSPTA tracks all BESS facilities proposed or permitted through local review in Washington State, leaving affected school communities to discover such proposals independently; and

Whereas, existing rules applicable to BESS facilities do not address proximity to schools, require community notice or consent, or mandate site-specific risk analysis for neighboring populations, and no county siting code closes this gap; and

Whereas, no law in Washington state requires centralized notice to school communities when a BESS facility is proposed nearby, requiring each school and school district to independently discover such proposals through its own monitoring of regulatory proceedings, a burden that falls most heavily on communities with limited technical, legal, and financial resources; and

Whereas, siting decisions for commercial facilities using BESS may disproportionately affect communities with fewer economic and political resources, which may lack access to technical expertise, face barriers to legal representation or independent safety review, and already bear cumulative environmental and public health burdens, creating a heightened risk that BESS facilities will be placed where residents are least able to evaluate risk, advocate for protective measures, or effectively participate in regulatory proceedings; and

Whereas, effective fire service response to a BESS incident depends on responders having

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manufacturer emergency response guidelines and site-specific pre-incident plans available before an incident occurs, because standard guidance directs crews at commercial and utility installations to follow the pre-plan rather than enter the structure and to operate emergency disconnects only where those are identified in advance, so that absent such documentation and site-specific hazard and evacuation plans, local departments cannot safely pre-plan response or protect nearby school populations; and

Whereas, with the emerging technology of BESS and subsequent incidents, there are exposure risks, local fire departments are not necessarily equipped or trained to manage large scale incidents and such firefighting efforts require hazmat firefighting techniques and equipment.

Therefore, be it

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils urge the Washington State Legislature to establish statewide siting and safety standards for facilities using 5 megawatt (MW) or larger Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) that establish minimum setbacks from schools and educational settings and require a site suitability analysis for proposed sites near schools or residential areas before a project enters the permitting process, ensuring consistent procedural safeguards regardless of the permitting authority; and be it further

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils advocate for mandatory early and meaningful public notification and structured community engagement processes when facilities using 5 MW or larger BESS are proposed near schools, educational settings or residential areas, including clear disclosure of project details, public meetings, and opportunities for community comment before siting decisions are finalized; and be it further

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils advocate for adequate funding and preparation requirements ensuring that local fire departments and emergency response agencies are fully informed, trained, and equipped to respond to incidents involving facilities using 5 MW or larger BESS, including access to safety documentation, emergency shutdown procedures, and site-specific hazard and evacuation plans before siting decisions are finalized.

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