



Pennsylvania Council of Churches

Harrisburg Hearing on Pennsylvania's Clean Vehicles Program

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I am the Rev. Sandra L. Strauss, Director of Public Advocacy for the Pennsylvania Council of Churches. As an organization made up of 43 member bodies representing 20 Anglican, Orthodox, and Protestant communions, we represent thousands of persons of faith throughout the Commonwealth. I am here to testify today with respect to an issue that is of significant concern to the Council's constituents.

As stated in the Council's *Principles for Public Advocacy*, we believe that "In a healthy society, the well-being of all is a priority." We also "...hold up the principle of sustainability, which suggests priorities that may include, but not be limited to... preservation of clean land, air and water... and greater responsibility in the use of energy." Because we support the health and well being of all, the creation of a cleaner environment, and policies that promote sustainability and responsibility in the use of our precious natural resources, we support the proposed amendments to the rules governing the Pennsylvania Clean Vehicles Program and full implementation of the Program as recommended by the Department of Environmental Protection.

The Council is aware of legislation pending in Pennsylvania's General Assembly that is designed to remove control of this program from the Environmental Quality Board and make the Clean Vehicles Program—modeled on the California Low-Emission Vehicle (LEV) standards—optional. We cannot afford to let this happen for a number of reasons.

Pennsylvania has some of the worst air quality problems in the country. Over half of Pennsylvania's counties—37 of 67—are dealing with smog pollution that exceeds federal health standards. This is a particular problem for thousands of Pennsylvanians in vulnerable populations. Older persons and children are particularly vulnerable to respiratory illnesses like asthma and bronchitis, and this kind of pollution has the potential to exacerbate health problems for persons with heart disease and other respiratory ailments. In fact, the American Lung Association of Pennsylvania reports that there is greater risk for children in areas with high concentrations of ozone, acid vapor, nitrogen dioxide and particulate pollution to develop chronic breathing problems due to poor lung development than for children in less-polluted areas. These pollutants are all produced by automobile emissions.

The impacts on Pennsylvania's environment and the environment of the world around us are great as well. Our *Principles* state, "We believe creation belongs to God, and that we are called to act as stewards of creation on God's behalf." Though there are those who continue to deny it, the preponderance of evidence is that global warming is a reality. We are only now beginning to see what many believe to be impacts of global warming, such as: (1) greater numbers of and more intense storms; (2) melting and reduction of the polar ice cap and the retreat of glaciers that threatens to cause flooding in low lying areas due to higher sea levels, as well as negative changes to ecosystems due to loss of habitat and species; and (3) changes in water temperatures that threaten to have significant influence on climates due to disruptions in ocean flow patterns—resulting in both higher and lower temperatures that are expected cause negative impacts on the areas affected.

Pennsylvania has been a significant contributor to the problem of global warming—emitting more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere than 105 other nations combined. The proposed amendments to Pennsylvania's Clean Vehicles Program could result in as much as a 30% reduction in these emissions from our vehicles, with little or no cost to Pennsylvanians. By implementing the Clean Vehicles Program as amended, Pennsylvania has the opportunity to dramatically reduce its embarrassing contribution to the global warming problem.

When we have the technology to improve emissions standards in our cars, it is fundamentally wrong to not do so because of pressures from industry groups that the cost is too high. This complaint about costs comes not just from the manufacturers, but from groups like the American Automobile Association, who claims

~~that the price of cars will increase anywhere from \$1,000 to \$3,000 to meet the California LEV standards.~~ It is our understanding based on price comparisons done by the DEP that this is not true.

The larger question for us is what the cost will be if we fail to design cars with lower emissions. These costs might be expected to manifest themselves in a variety of ways:

- We have seen unprecedented increases in the cost of fuel in the wake of Katrina. Continued conflict in Iraq, and the threat of other conflicts could result in even higher costs. Low emission vehicles are more fuel-efficient—the California Air Resources Board has estimated that by 2012, cars with lower emission standards are estimated to save owners approximately 1,048 gallons of gasoline over the ten-year life of a vehicle. At today's prices, consumers would save, on average, \$2,250-\$2,500. At a time of dwindling supplies, however, along with conditions like natural disasters and conflicts that create shortages and disruptions in supply, the price of fuel can only be expected to rise, intensified by pressures of supply and demand and the greater cost to extract fuels from difficult to reach and environmentally sensitive areas—such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, or ANWR. Therefore, over time, savings on fuel costs due to greater fuel efficiency will probably grow.
- Health care costs to address illnesses caused or exacerbated by air pollution are high, and have the potential to grow even higher at a time when many Pennsylvanians are uninsured or lack access to adequate health care for a variety of reasons. Those who are most vulnerable to the effects of pollutants from vehicle emissions—children and older persons—are also most likely to be affected by lack of access to health care. Our citizens will pay one way or another—those who are insured will continue to see increases in the cost of health care coverage, those who are uninsured or underinsured will find themselves hopelessly mired in debt, or society will pay the cost in the form of government sponsored health care programs. We believe it is wrong and an injustice to our citizens to ignore the rising cost health care due to illnesses caused by air pollution that is preventable.
- There is also an economic issue at stake for the Commonwealth and its citizens. In an environment where Pennsylvania is already struggling to keep, much less expand, industry in order to expand employment opportunities for its citizens—having smog pollution levels that already exceed federal health standards in over half of our counties will severely limit business and industry growth opportunities in these counties. We believe that Pennsylvania must do what it can to promote economic justice and opportunity, and therefore Pennsylvania cannot afford to keep losing opportunities for industry and employment growth to other states that are meeting federal health standards for smog pollution.
- Finally, we do not yet know what the costs of global warming may be. Many believe that in an era of global warming, storms like Katrina will become more commonplace. If that is true, there will certainly be costs, and they will likely be great.

According to "Human Creatures as Part of the Whole of Creation," in ***Sign of Peril, Test of Faith: Accelerated Climate Change***, from the World Council of Churches:

As human beings, we have to respect [God's] order if we are to live on earth. When the limits set by God are transgressed, the fragile balance can easily be broken...Humans are creatures whose life flourishes only as they respect their connection with the whole...The patterns of behavior and industry that we establish for ourselves are often at odds with the ecological cycles into which they need to fit.

And finally, again, from our ***Principles for Public Advocacy***, we believe:

Dangerous outcomes result when short-term practices such as human population pressures, excessive consumption, and abuse of the global climate and the ozone layer continue unabated. Sustainability results when the quality of life for future generations is not compromised by current practices and when decisions affecting an immediate locale (NOTE: Such as state like Pennsylvania) do not ignore the larger impact on the entire planet and its ecosystems.

Based on the scientific evidence concerning the environmental impacts of pollution from vehicles, technology that permits production of cleaner vehicles at no extra cost, the potential benefits to Pennsylvania's citizens and industry through lower costs, cleaner environment, better health, and improved business environment, the Pennsylvania Council of Churches, guided by our ***Principles*** calling for protecting the environment and the health and welfare of our citizens, urges the Environmental Quality Board to adopt the proposed amendments to the Pennsylvania Clean Vehicles Program and promote full implementation of the Program at the earliest possible date.