

RGGI Public Comment

Provided by The Office of State Representative Melissa L. Shusterman (D-Chester/Montgomery)



Introduction

Hello, I am Representative Melissa Shusterman. I represent Pennsylvania's 157th Legislative district which makes up Tredyffrin Township, Schuylkill Township and the Borough of Phoenixville in Chester County, and part of Upper Providence Township in Montgomery County. In the Legislature, I serve as a Deputy Whip, and I am also a Vice-Chair of the Southeast Delegation. Working on Pennsylvania's approach to Climate Change has been one of my biggest priorities since being elected in 2018.

Why PA Should Join RGGI

I firmly believe that Pennsylvania needs to join the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative. This is a critical cap-and-invest program that creates economic incentives for reducing carbon emissions. The science on climate change, on the effects of harmful emissions is settled. It's time for Pennsylvania to join our neighbors, and start taking action steps to limit our carbon emissions.

Pennsylvania stands to benefit by joining RGGI in a three main ways

(1) Firstly, joining RGGI will be a big step toward combating climate change. Pennsylvania is currently the fourth highest greenhouse gas producer in the country. As Pennsylvanians, we have a responsibility to reduce our carbon footprint. Joining RGGI would allow PA to make a substantial step in that direction, and we know this because we have been able to observe these positive impacts in our neighboring states.

In the 10 year period from 2008 to 2018, states who are **RGGI members have cut their carbon production in half**. Joining RGGI is projected to reduce our Commonwealth's carbon emissions by **188 million tons by 2030**. This would have **major** environmental impact. Pennsylvania should be a leader in going green, not standing by while we watch our neighbors take charge.

(2) Secondly, we must acknowledge that climate change is a Public Health crisis. Joining RGGI will lead to a decrease in pollution that has a direct negative impact on our health. Our seniors, children, and economically poor residents are disproportionately harmed by pollution. Asthma risks can be greatly prevented by reducing air pollution, and premature deaths caused by respiratory illnesses can also be significantly cut with the reduction of carbon emissions.

A further example hits close to home... scientists have linked an increase in the **frequency of pandemics** as a result of climate change. That's right, if we don't make a sizeable impact in limiting carbon emissions soon, crises like the COVID-19 pandemic may become all too common.

(3) Finally, I am aware that some of my colleagues equate a renewable energy and alternative energy future with negative economic impact and job loss. This is simply not true. In our neighboring states, RGGI membership has proven beneficial for creating jobs, reducing electricity prices, and generating billions of dollars of revenue to be invested in clean energy projects.

Electricity rates have fallen by 5.7% in RGGI states, meaning more money in utility users' pockets. Our neighbors are outpacing other states by 31% in economic growth due to their RGGI membership. Pennsylvania is projected to **add 27,000 jobs and generate nearly \$2 Billion** by joining the initiative.

These are the policy-driven, big-picture reasons. But I also want to talk about a consequence of climate change that I know severely impacting my constituents in Southeastern PA, as well as residents all over the state. That

consequence is the increased intensity of rainfall and stormwater issues. Increased instances of flooding are plaguing my constituents. So much so that I held a policy hearing in December of 2019 to present the issues residents in my district are facing to Legislators from throughout the state. This increased intensity in rainstorms is a direct result of climate change.

In conversations with my constituents, I've learned about the extreme damage caused to their personal property. I have heard from constituents who have spent tens of thousands of dollars to try to mitigate further flood damage to their property. They have not only seen their homes compromised from a safety perspective, but have also seen their property values drop dramatically. Many of these homes were purchased years ago before this level of flooding became a norm in our area, and families chose to settle and raise families here with the promise that they were making a good investment.

In conversations with the municipalities in my district, I've quickly discovered the negative effects these storms have on our infrastructure — overflowing grates that lead to unintended runoff, the swift deterioration of our roads. Streams of running water and standing water make our busiest roadways dangerous and unreliable to navigate. We understand that bad storms happen, and were once accustomed to picking up the pieces of extreme weather events once, maybe twice a year. Now it seems that these storms come monthly, and cause new damage before past damage can even be remediated. That means homes are flooding regularly, driveways and cars are at constant risk for damage, you cannot depend on the road you use to drive home to your family to be open, and safe to drive on. Joining RGGI will be a major step into limiting these storms. We owe it to our constituents to do everything we can to make an impact, and cut the costs and frequency of these damages.

Conclusion

Greenhouse gas emissions cut in half, \$2.7 billion raised.

These are no small feats. RGGI has enabled states to invest more than \$1 billion in energy efficiency and \$270 million in clean and renewable energy.

It could raise another \$7 billion more by 2030.

This is a well-operated and successful initiative that sets the standard for a greener future. Joining RGGI would solidify Pennsylvania's commitment to clean air and water, the health of our residents, and necessary economic growth. It is a regional partnership that could help us make a real difference in the future of each and every Pennsylvanian. Sustainability is not an option, it is the only path forward.