



I am writing to submit my comments during PA-DEP's public comment period in support of Pennsylvania joining RGGI, the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative.

As state representative, one of my top legislative priorities has been eliminating poverty—a moral issue of our time as it steadily and adversely impacts countless communities across our commonwealth. Empowering our communities with the tools for economic mobility must include achieving environmental justice.

By joining the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), we will not only reduce climate pollution, but can also dismantle the widespread environmental apartheid that has resulted in generations of disenfranchised communities to be subjected to harmful pollution that impacts their health.

People living in poverty account for more than 20% of the public health impacts from industrial air pollution, compared to 12.9% of the population nationwide. For our commonwealth—that has long been a leader in fracking and mining—this statistic is even more evident.

Environmental devastation has subjected communities to depleted natural resources, particularly the lack of potable drinking water, and increased health risks such as asthma and cancer. Additionally, when mining and fracking sources are depleted, companies vacate the area, leaving swaths of residents jobless and forcing them into poverty.

These environmental injustices found among individual minority groups, however.

People of color—African Americans, Latinos, and Indigenous people—are more likely to be exposed to harmful environs. African Americans and Indigenous people, regardless of their socio-economic status, are more likely to be subjected to harmful environmental abuse. Many reside in communities that are literally killing them. Additionally, with Pennsylvania being a leader in agriculture, Latino workers—making up a sizeable portion of the workforce—are more likely to be exposed to harmful chemicals in pesticides.

Much has been said about the need of joining RGGI to protect public health, but very few highlight the how classism and racism plays a key role in worsening the impacts of pollution. This results in stark disparities in quality of life among Pennsylvanians. These are issues we absolutely cannot ignore. Article 1 Section 27 of the PA Constitution grants every Pennsylvanian “a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment.” But it is clear that upholding this part of our constitution is unfounded when it comes to uplifting impoverished communities and communities of color. We must not only join RGGI to protect the lives of Pennsylvanians, but also be mindful of how socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity plays a factor.