



**Testimony to Pennsylvania Department of the Environment**

*December 11th, 2020*

*Testifier #48*

My name is Seth Bush, S E T H B U S H.

I live in Swissvale, PA, and I am testifying as a Pennsylvania native.

The key message I want to leave you with is this: the transition from fossil fuels to a clean, regenerative energy economy is inevitable, but doing it in a way that Pennsylvanians benefit is not. The old way of making energy with coal and gas will go away, one way or another. That is inevitable. But we have a choice about what happens next, when, and how we get there.

One option is to keep going the old way, ignoring or excusing the effects that burning fossil fuels has on our air quality, our health, and the climate until the resources run out, the world changes without us, or we've made ourselves so sick we can't keep going.

OR we can choose the path that RGGI provides to us: that is to invest in a modern energy economy and transition with some grace. I'd like you to consider that the second option might be better for Pennsylvanians, and that there's no reason to delay.

RGGI is a proven way to modernize our energy economy with a plan. I can say it's proven because I spent several years living in Maryland, one of the 9 states that's been in RGGI since its inception over a decade ago. I lived in Baltimore and got to see the benefits first-hand.

There are two important ways that RGGI has worked to improve air quality in Maryland and modernize the state's energy economy. The first way that RGGI works is to help phase out the old energy economy by shifting incentives from burning polluting coal & gas for power to generating power from renewable sources.

Four coal plants have been retired in Maryland since the state joined RGGI, two near major population centers. I remember when my friend Doris who lives in Baltimore and has COPD despite never smoking a cigarette in her life told me how her breathing has improved since the C.P. Crane coal plant closed just outside the city. That means she spends less sick days out of work as an educator, and I get to keep a healthy friend. I have

lots of friends in Pennsylvania with breathing-related health challenges who I want to stay healthy also, yet dangerous power plant emissions in PA in 2019 were nearly equal to those in all of the RGGI states combined. This means more bad air quality days, more sick families, and a great burden on our communities. It's time for that to change.

So it's about cleaning up our dirty energy systems AND building renewable energy to take their place. I also remember how good it felt to go to Sunday worship with my community at Homewood Friends Meeting knowing the building's electricity came from new solar panels on the roof that were made possible with a grant funded by RGGI revenue. What if Pennsylvanians had such easy access to renewable energy also?

The second way that RGGI works is by investing in community-led energy efficiency measures and job-creating infrastructure improvements so less energy is wasted. This helps to reduce energy consumption overall, thus reducing pollution AND taking pressure off the whole energy system to make the transition from fossil fuels to renewables easier. The State of Maryland makes funds earned through RGGI available to local organizations like Retrofit Baltimore, a local non-profit that provides free energy efficiency audits & retrofits to low-income homeowners. Perhaps the best part is, though, that Retrofit Baltimore trains people every year to do the work and then pays them to get on-the-job experience. The result has been an infusion of skilled labor and good jobs into Baltimore's local economy. And we know this example from Baltimore is not isolated. These sorts of programs have cropped up in suburban and rural areas of Maryland and other RGGI states also. Analysis Group has shown that RGGI has created 45,000 job-years of work since 2011 across the member states. As the inevitable transition happens, Pennsylvania can't afford to pass on the job growth possible with energy efficiency and renewable energy industries that would impact not just the cities, but our rural areas also.

Maryland has used RGGI to choose a more easeful, economically savvy path to a modern energy economy, and Marylanders have benefited greatly from improved air quality, job creation, and reduced energy waste. Now it's Pennsylvanians' turn to benefit from RGGI.

I urge the EQB to finalize the rulemaking as soon as possible, with some minor modifications further described in my written testimony\*. It's time to put RGGI to work now so we can transition to a modern energy economy with some grace instead of waiting until it's too late. And we must do it in a way that trusts the people most affected by poor air quality and the burden of high energy bills to invest the revenue in a way that helps them

benefit from the transition to this new energy economy. When we choose that path, we will all benefit.

Thank you.

\*Minor modifications that I request & requests of DEP, which should not be made at the cost of slowing down approval of the rule:

1. DEP should conduct regular assessments of the levels of power sector co-pollutants to which environmental justice communities are exposed. If it is determined that a community is experiencing increased levels of co-pollutant exposure relative to a pre-RGGI baseline, the DEP should engage residents and leaders in that community to identify an appropriate remedy.
2. The initial cap must be set at a level that is no higher than the actual emissions in the year before the program. If pre-RGGI emissions decline faster than expected, the initial cap of 78 million short tons may need to be adjusted downward.
3. Adaptive management is crucial. RGGI should contain specific mechanisms to study the impacts and adjust for effects that are unexpected or undesirable. A vague commitment to the concept of adaptive management is not sufficient; specific, mandatory follow-up measures must be integrated into the regulations where possible. We know there are often unforeseen flaws that require modification after a cap-and-invest system like RGGI is in place. That is why it is essential to conduct the appropriate studies and report the findings to the public.
4. The direct effect of RGGI is likely to be regressive: it will disproportionately burden low-income households with higher energy prices as producers pass emissions-reduction costs on to consumers. Therefore, Pennsylvania should use auction revenues to counter this effect. One advantage to RGGI, as opposed to more conventional regulation, is that while both may increase consumers' prices, allowance auctioning provides a funded mechanism for countering the effect. Additionally, the auction revenues should be invested back into the very communities that have historically and presently face the burden of fossil fuel power plant pollution. Investment into community schools, greenspaces, and sustainable well-paying jobs should be a priority.
5. The Department should not allow certain fossil fuel power plants (i.e., coal waste fire power plants and combined heat and power energy sources) to externalize the polluting cost completely. RGGI can be tailored to fit the needs of the Commonwealth. Currently, the Commonwealth requires a cap-and-invest program

that will lower emissions and earn funds. Therefore, by allowing certain fossil fuel power plants to not pay for their emissions, the state loses one of the central pillars of an effective cap-and-invest program. Instead, if the RGGI program charged a reduced rate for the same power plants, the goal of lowering emission levels and generating funds are both met without the burden of pollution falling on the state and the taxpayer.

6. When issuing air pollution permits, the Department must base its final determination on an informed decision. This decision must be based on a macro level. Information such as the residents' testimony, current and proposed ambient air quality, permittee's violation history, public benefit, population statistics, nearby schools, long-term care facilities, nursing homes, and cost-benefit analysis must be considered.

Seth Bush  
2425 Woodstock Ave.  
Swissvale, PA 15218

Phone: (267) 474-3488  
Email: sbush116@gmail.com