

Ava Roberts RGGI Testimony, December 14



Good afternoon everyone! My name is Ava Roberts (spell name), a Junior at Carnegie Mellon University and a native Pittsburgher - I currently live on Darlington Rd in Pittsburgh PA 15217. I am testifying today in support of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative because it is a keystone in the keystone state's clean and healthy future.

My family and I moved away from Pittsburgh to western Maryland when I was barely two. We feared the environment, the air and water quality in Pittsburgh, specifically, would continue to deteriorate and that my mom's asthma would consequently worsen if we continued to live there.

Because I've always had a soft spot for Pittsburgh, however, I moved back to attend school at Chatham University. Unfortunately, I've seen my parents' fears about the area's environmental risks come true when living here throughout the past three years. Allegheny County [ranks second](#) highest in the nation for cancer risk from air pollution – [it emits more Carbon than all of the RGGI states combined](#). It also has the [4th worst levels of greenhouse gas emissions in the nation](#), which are made up of chemical compounds like Carbon Dioxide and Sulfur Dioxide - which can not only worsen the effects of climate change, with things like more dangerously hot and dry summers, but these chemicals can also create health defects. To put this into perspective, for an entire week in November, I barely went outside in Pittsburgh due to sinus problems, nasal drainage, and lungs aching from breathing the air on my morning runs. When I returned home to Maryland in mid-November for Thanksgiving break, the clean, crisp air felt like a retreat.

Additionally, as other testimony has noted thus far, studies show Environmental Justice communities, or those in Pennsylvania where 20% or more individuals live in poverty or where 30% or more of the population is a racial minority, absorb the [highest risks of air-pollution related deaths in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, specifically](#). [These communities, especially racial minority ones, also have the highest Emergency Room visits for asthma complications](#). This pollution spurred by high emitting industrial sites disproportionately harms Environmental Justice Communities - and RGGI's strict limits on these polluters can be a very fundamental first step in restorative justice for these groups.

People like my family, and especially those living in these Environmental Justice communities who are most detrimentally impacted by industrial pollution, should not have to choose health over living in Pittsburgh – or any other place, for that matter. Pennsylvania needs to act now to clean up our dirty air, before it is too late. And RGGI will not only reduce our Carbon emissions from polluting power plants, but we'll also see reductions in other harmful pollutants that cause the potentially dangerous health problems I mentioned.

My story is just one example of how poor air quality, which is also a major driver of climate change, can ultimately drive people away from our great state of Pennsylvania. Therefore, I ask Pennsylvania to join our neighboring states and adopt RGGI. The data on the efficiency of this program is simply too good to ignore - from 2008 through 2018, Carbon pollution has decreased [by 47%](#) in participating RGGI states, [outpacing the rest of the country by 90%](#). Additionally, implementing the program in Pennsylvania would create 27,000 new jobs and put nearly \$2 billion into the state's economy over the next decade alone. Not only this, but we could avoid hundreds of premature deaths due to poor air quality, and reduce our carbon emissions by [188 million tons by 2030](#). Reduction in the air pollution related deaths I previously talked about *alone* is enough reason to join RGGI - and the rest of the benefits are nothing to scoff at, either.

This initiative could prevent people like my family, who are concerned about their and their loved ones' futures, from being driven away from Pennsylvania. It will also have the dual benefit of reinvigorating our economy, which is especially needed after the COVID-19 crisis' effects on our state and our country's economy. I also ask that Pennsylvania considers adding an Environmental Justice provision in its adoption of RGGI – [perhaps something similar to New Jersey's RGGI Strategic Funding Plan, which addresses racial and socioeconomic inequities within previous environmental policies](#). Overall, the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative is a slam dunk for Pennsylvania - it is a vote to preserve *all* Pennsylvanians' health now, and for a cleaner and healthier future. Thank you for your time.