



## Testimony for CO2 Budget Trading Program Regulation

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My name is Rev. John Bergen, and I serve as a Pastor at Germantown Mennonite Church in the Germantown neighborhood in Philadelphia. But before I was a pastor, I grew up in a small town in central Kansas. Every week when we drove out to visit my great aunt and uncle on their farm, we passed natural gas pumping units standing in every wheat field. Any time we took a trip to the big city of Wichita, or left the county driving in any direction, we passed gas compressors and oil refineries. It is not surprising, then, that I, like many of my friends, developed asthma, and to this day sometimes struggle to breathe after exercising. For the past year, after I go on a run, I always ask myself, "Do I have COVID, or did I just grow up near fossil fuel infrastructure?"

I left home to attend college in northeast Ohio, just as the fracking companies that had decimated Western PA began to make their play for the Utica Shale fields. A couple moved to our small town in Ohio from Washington County, PA, having literally fled the state because of the toxic fumes, flammable water, and rising cancer rates. Our other neighbors were dealing with decades of industrial collapse in and around Youngstown and Cleveland, and struggled to resist the deal pushed on them by the government and corporate interests: Sell us your mineral rights, and after we leave a poorly-capped well that leaks everywhere you and your neighbors will be stuck holding the medical bills. Because the state offered no other meaningful economic opportunities, many made this deal with the devil. Some people died: From cancer, from explosions, from poverty when the jobs went elsewhere. The devil always wins these deals.

I now live in West Philadelphia, less than two miles from the recently-closed PES refinery. Once again, the fossil fuel industry has spent decades poisoning my neighbors and warping the local economy into its vision. I have sat in meetings convened by the city that have pitted steelworkers against their neighbors, a false choice between economic well-being and health.

I am here to testify in favor of Pennsylvania joining the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative. I call on the Environmental Quality Board (EQB) and the Department of Environmental Protection to not allow fossil fuel power plants to increase their emissions once RGGI is implemented. Additionally, the Department must rely upon site-specific data to inform the

full scope of existing and potential degradation and to impose additional conditions that are necessary to prevent and remedy degradation.

Ultimately, our state's participation in RGGI is a matter of survival. The dying fossil fuel industry sits on our democratic processes as a huge, dead weight. Fossil fuels industries have been poisoning and profiting for too long, while preventing disadvantaged environmental justice communities from achieving justice and clean energy technologies from gaining greater usage. It is not enough that we join RGGI and use it to take the equivalent of four million cars off the road, as the DEP's own study has said that it would. The rule-making should follow equity principles by distributing environmental and economic benefits to disproportionately impacted communities that have faced historic environmental disparities, severe economic harm, or demonstrated cumulative impact of environmental risk. We must and we can use this opportunity to create jobs for communities who have never recovered from deindustrialization, and who have been systematically excluded from the economy. We can and we must prioritize projects to improve the health and well-being of those who are suffering under the dead weight of the devil's deal.

For too long, our state has shaken hands with the devil, and the devil has come to collect his dues in the lungs of our children, the bodies of our neighbors, and the poverty of our communities. It is time to break this contract, and forge a green new deal with the people of Pennsylvania. It is time to join the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative and use it as one tool in this fight to create good jobs and a livable planet for all.