



Dear Members of the Environmental Quality Board,

As members of varied faith communities, we have a moral responsibility to care for the most vulnerable and to act as good stewards of our Common Home. Unfortunately, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is falling short on both as we have some of the worst air quality as well as the fourth dirtiest power sector in the nation.

The power sector emits dangerous, health-harming pollutants like particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, and heavy metals. In 2019, the Pennsylvania power sector was the sixth and ninth highest emitter of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide in the country, respectively. Both pollutants are damaging to human health on their own and react to form other health-harming pollutants. Nitrogen oxides react with other pollution to form ground-level ozone, also known as smog, which can trigger asthma attacks and cause lung damage. In the 2020 American Lung Association ["State of the Air" report](#), nine Pennsylvania counties, including Philadelphia and Allegheny counties, received failing grades for ozone pollution levels.

Power plants tend to be disproportionately located in minority and low-income areas, exposing these communities to the greatest share of dangerous air pollution. In the Commonwealth, the [asthma prevalence rate](#) for African American children is over three times higher than it is for white children, and the asthma prevalence rate for Hispanic children is over two times higher than it is for white children.

While the most vulnerable among us are most impacted, all Pennsylvanians suffer from this pollution. Further, the Centers for Disease Control reports that people suffering from medical conditions including heart disease, diabetes and lung disease, which are worsened by air pollution, are "at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19." A [new study](#) published this fall found that higher historical PM2.5 exposures were associated with higher county-level COVID-19 mortality rates.

The power sector not only contributes to direct health impacts but to indirect threats as well. The Pennsylvania power sector is the fourth highest emitter of dangerous carbon pollution. Temperatures in Pennsylvania increased 1.8°F in just the last century. If we do not choose a better path, Pennsylvania could warm another 5.4°F by 2050. We must choose Life for the world and all who live in it.

Increased temperature heightens smog levels and is at least partially responsible for the Lyme Disease epidemic currently sweeping through Pennsylvania, to say nothing of West Nile and other vector-borne diseases down the road. Our climate has changed, and our power sector makes it worse.

The power sector fuels climate change, placing an even greater burden on our children, their future families, and their communities. Responsibility to our neighbors now and to generations to come call us to do better, now that we know better.

For all these reasons, we support the DEP's draft rule on the **CO2 budget trading program**, newly released for comment. By adopting this draft rule and participating in the **Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI)**, Pennsylvania has the opportunity to slash deadly air pollution and protect the health of its residents. [Modeling](#) by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) found that by linking with RGGI, Pennsylvania could reduce 188,000,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions, 112,000 tons of nitrogen oxide emissions and 67,000 tons of sulfur dioxide emissions.

RGGI has a proven track record for health improvements: the program has [already](#) prevented hundreds of deaths, thousands of respiratory symptoms, and tens of thousands of lost workdays in the participating states. We have so much to gain from this program, which could save hundreds of lives and improve quality of life for residents across the Commonwealth.

For far too long, we have prioritized the fossil fuel industry over the health of our people, and our communities. It is past time to make a better covenant with the future

Sincerely,

(Signers' organizations are listed for affiliation purposes only)

Rev. Sandra L. Strauss, Director of Advocacy and Ecumenical Outreach, Pennsylvania Council of Churches

Joy Bergey, Director, Environmental Justice Center of Chestnut Hill United Church

Sister Diane Bardol, Social Justice Coordinator, Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart

Pastor Paul Metzloff, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Rev. Joan M. Sabatino, Director, UUJustice PA (Unitarian Universalist Justice Pennsylvania)

Rabbi Daniel Swartz, Executive Director, Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life

Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Executive Director, The Shalom Center

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Sr. Arlene McDonough, OSF, Aston, Pa.

Sr. Kari Pohl, Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden, Pa.

Tracey DePasquale, Director, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pa.

cc: Governor Tom Wolf

Secretary Patrick McDonnell