



## Testimony of Elaine Labalme

RGGI Public Hearing, December 8, 2020

Elaine Labalme, 115 Roycroft Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15228 (412) 996-4112

Good morning. My name is Elaine Labalme and I live in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning on the issue of Pennsylvania's participation in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative. **I am speaking today as a private citizen.**

While I am not a native Pittsburgher, my husband, Fen, lived in the city as a boy. Back then, the city was infamously referred to as "hell with the lid off" due to persistent smoke and haze from the city's industrial output, primarily the production of steel. Fen recalls driving with his dad through the city's streets with the lights on at noon – not just the car lights but the street lights as well. The unhealthy air that blanketed the region is what my husband believes led to his asthma diagnosis while still in elementary school and to this day, he is still dealing with the harmful impacts of this disease. Fen and his family left the region while he was in high school and he swore he'd never come back.

Fast forward to 2007 and Fen and I relocated to Pittsburgh from San Francisco with our then-five-year-old son, Steven, as the region had grown to be a hub of culture and technology with affordable real estate and prime school districts. I actually spent a year researching where to live and pored over more than 40 options before finally settling on Pittsburgh. Regrettably, what slipped through the cracks in my research was the city's poor air quality, still dealing with its industrial legacy in the form of coal-fired power plants and now bearing the added burden of oil and gas air pollution. And, well, it wasn't but a few years before our only child was diagnosed with asthma as well despite our family's overarching focus on a healthy lifestyle.

Rather than wallow in despair, I committed to working toward solutions that would address the air pollution in the region and beyond, work I do to this day as a consultant for Environmental Defense Fund. It's clear that in order to tackle Pennsylvania's air pollution problem and meaningfully address climate change, we need to substantially cut the over 89 million tons of climate and air pollution generated annually by our electric power sector. Think about that for a moment: 89 million tons of pollution spewed into our air every year that is harming lungs young and old as it contributes to a climate crisis we will saddle our children with if we don't do something now. This is completely unacceptable.

Enter the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, or RGGI, a cap-and-invest program that, as others have referenced today, will allow Pennsylvania to achieve significant reductions in its carbon emissions and promote economic development via investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency. This program will also reduce harmful pollution in communities that have been burdened for far too long. With engagement from the legislature, Pennsylvania can also follow the lead of other RGGI states that have invested in infrastructure, customer bill support, and provided assistance to impacted workers and communities. RGGI has a proven track record of success among the 10 northeastern states currently participating in the program: Research has shown that it has helped curb climate and air pollution across these states. Plus, it has the support of over 70 percent of Pennsylvanians according to a September 2020 poll.

Linking to RGGI is the kind of solution we need to help keep Pennsylvanians healthy, protect our environment, and act on climate change. Will it be enough? Safe to say it's one of many steps we'll need to take. Unfortunately, it's not enough for my now-college-freshman son, who is steadfast that he

will not return to Pittsburgh post-college as he is unwilling to consign another generation of Labalmes to asthma and associated impacts of air pollution.

I urge the Department of Environmental Protection and the Environmental Quality Board to move forward with the RGGI rulemaking quickly. It's the right thing to do for all Pennsylvanians.