

RGGI Testimony
Lindsey Walaski
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Good afternoon members of the Environmental Control Board of the Department of Environmental Protection.

My name is Lindsey Walaski, and I am a mechanical engineer from Philadelphia. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak with you as a private citizen this afternoon to provide my support for Pennsylvania joining the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI).

In my six years of living in the keystone state, I have already witnessed local impacts from climate change, through more frequent and intense rain events, heat waves, and severe weather throughout the year. The Commonwealth has committed to fighting climate change through statewide carbon reduction goals established in the 2018 Climate Action Plan. Now, we must focus on creating and implementing solutions to achieve these goals.

The electricity sector is the second largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the Commonwealth, highlighting the tremendous opportunity for reductions. While opponents of RGGI erroneously claim this program will initiate a “carbon tax”, in fact, the price of carbon on electricity is already being paid by Pennsylvanians who experience air pollution, health problems due to respiratory illnesses, and other impacts of climate change. These burdens disproportionately impact low-income families and communities of color. The RGGI program will ensure these environmental impacts are accounted for in the true cost of electricity.

Pennsylvania would be the twelfth state to join this initiative, and RGGI has proven success within the participating states. These states have reduced power plant carbon emissions by 47% since the program’s inception, with tremendous economic benefits as well. The reported proceeds from participating states are estimated to be \$2 billion, while generating job growth and increasing the per-capita GDP. The revenue collected from RGGI can be allocated towards smaller organizations in the state, filling in the financial gap to support a clean energy transition beyond improvements in the power plants. Maryland has funded more than \$500 million in energy efficiency upgrades for low- to moderate-income households and small businesses. Delaware utilizes RGGI revenue to fund energy efficiency upgrades in K-12 schools throughout the state. In participating states, electricity prices in the regions decreased by 6.4% in the first eight years of the program due to lower demand through energy efficiency programs funded by RGGI. The opportunity to fund more energy efficiency and renewable energy projects will expand the positive impacts of the RGGI program beyond the electricity-producing power plants.

As the state continues to recover from the economic devastation caused by COVID-19, the revenue collected from RGGI can be allocated towards the most deserving populations. Example investments include energy bill assistance, low-income home improvement programs, and support for communities that have been impacted by the energy transition away from fossil fuels and towards clean energy. Participation in RGGI is expected to generate tens of thousands of jobs in the Commonwealth, creating sustainable economic opportunities for Pennsylvanians for years to come and prioritizing a clean energy economy in the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my support for this important program. I really appreciate all of DEP’s efforts to make this program a reality in the state.