



Testimony to the Environmental Quality Board  
Re: Proposed Rulemaking: CO2 Budget Trading Program (#7-559)  
12/9/2020 – afternoon session

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Good afternoon. My name is Drew Harris. My professional experience is in public health, disaster preparedness and clinical medicine. Most importantly, I live in Pennsylvania and care deeply about the legacy I will leave to my two daughters and generations yet to be born. I am here to encourage you to adopt the proposed RGGI regulations and suggest that the EQB amend those regulations to strengthen the provisions that protect health and vulnerable communities.

Philadelphia, like so many parts of the state, is a tale of two cities when it comes to education, economics and especially health outcomes. Imagine you are the child unfortunate enough to be born in one of the zip codes where life expectancy can be as much as 20 years lower than a more affluent neighborhood a few miles away. A legacy of racial injustice traps that child's family in a place where environmental conditions loom large as determinants of adverse health outcomes.

Just one example ... Pennsylvania summers are hot and getting hotter. DEP reports that average temperatures in the Commonwealth have [increased 1.8 degrees](#)<sup>1</sup> Fahrenheit over the past 110 years. This seemingly small change has had a large impact on all areas of the state, but the burden is not borne equally. Low-income and minority communities suffer more. [Poor neighborhoods in Philadelphia](#)<sup>2</sup> can be as much as 22 degrees hotter than wealthier ones. A child living in these communities is more likely to suffer severe asthma putting them at risk for hospitalization and countless missed school days. Low income seniors are particularly at risk from heat waves when air conditioning and easy access to shady green spaces are costly amenities. These communities are also at higher risk for natural disasters exacerbated by climate-change.

While excess atmospheric carbon is a global problem, some pollutants released in the burning of fossil fuels directly harm people downwind of these generating facilities. [Nitrogen Oxide and Sulfur Dioxide emissions](#)<sup>3</sup> exacerbate lung conditions like asthma, COPD and other chronic diseases. Like excess heat, the burden is greater for people living in marginalized communities where these facilities are often located. Lung damage from chronic exposure to these airborne pollutants is thought to make [Covid-19 more deadly](#)<sup>4</sup>--another blow for people already at high risk for the disease. The burden of these and other pollution-related diseases is a barrier that limits success, imposes avoidable healthcare costs on everyone, and is a drag on the entire commonwealth.

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<sup>1</sup> What is Climate Change? PA DEP

<sup>2</sup> Heat Vulnerability Index highlights City hot spots. City of Philadelphia

<sup>3</sup> Sulfur Dioxide. American Lung Association

<sup>4</sup> Coronavirus and Air Pollution. Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

While the health challenges are great, a remedy is before you. RGGI should be praised as a free-market innovation for pricing in the true cost of greenhouse gas emissions--not a rigid regulatory approach. Without RGGI, power plants are free to emit unlimited amounts of CO2. The science is clear: CO2 emissions are driving the climate change crisis and fossil-fuel power plants are a major source of this greenhouse gas. RGGI will require utilities to factor in the cost of the damage done in their pricing.

The RGGI rules you are considering will address historic and ongoing racial injustices by helping to slow and reverse future greenhouse gas and other pollution-related harms, and provide a new source of revenue that will mitigate past injuries. However, you should strengthen the proposed regulations by preventing generators from building new plants in already burdened communities.

RGGI is a rare win-win opportunity for the Commonwealth. For a small increase in rates, we will see a decrease in the economic burden these emissions cause; a new source of revenue for mitigating pollution-related harms—especially in adversely impacted communities; and a stimulus for creating a green-based economy. RGGI is an investment in future generations.

Thank you very much.