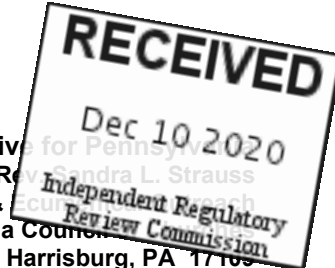




Testimony in Support of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative
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My name is the Rev. Sandra Strauss. I am a resident of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and the Director of Advocacy and Ecumenical Outreach for the Pennsylvania Council of Churches. Thank you for this opportunity to speak today in support of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative—one of the most important and effective programs for reducing emissions and creating jobs for so much of this northeast region.

Pennsylvania's participation in RGGI is long overdue. We called for it more than 10 years ago, and the need to join has only grown more urgent as we move ever closer from climate crisis to climate catastrophe.

There are numerous reasons for our entry into RGGI. As people of faith, we take to heart God's command to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden "to till it and keep it." This was a command not just for them but for all generations. This fragile planet is not ours to despoil—as the psalmist said, "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it." We are called to hold it in trust, to protect and preserve.

But beyond these faith imperatives, substantial reductions in global warming emissions can provide innumerable benefits for residents of the Commonwealth, as it is already doing in the states that have long been part of RGGI. Savings from health benefits alone are already estimated to be well in the millions, but let's put a face on it. For the millions of our neighbors who suffer from asthma and other respiratory conditions, heart disease, and who live in areas where they cannot avoid exposure to health endangering emissions from power plants and other large emitters, the benefit is priceless. We know that exposure can cause problems for mothers, leading to pre-term and low-weight births, which can mean a lifetime of health problems for the children. However, on a more personal level, I must share that my husband has been a cancer patient. Chemotherapy and other cancer-addressing drugs have made him more susceptible to the effects of pollution. Like many cancer patients, the drugs have caused damage to his lungs, leading to early stage emphysema. Reduced levels of the kinds of emissions that RGGI will curb will help to preserve his health and extend his life—just as it will for thousands like him. It will mean generations of healthier children who grow into healthier adults, which will reduce the strain on our healthcare system and will reduce the stress on families that must deal with ongoing health impacts.

Jobs, of course, are always a concern. We know that the fossil fuels we have depended on are finite—so even if dangerous emissions were not an issue, we must undergo a transition to renewable energy sources. We also have a responsibility to ensure that workers in these industries are treated fairly. Our Commonwealth estimates that new, clean energy jobs will more than replace the fossil fuel jobs that will eventually end. In addition, we will all benefit when fugitive emissions from gas wells, pipelines, and transport of fossil fuels is dramatically reduced or eliminated.

Before I conclude, I want to come back to the environment. For years I have been a gardener, composter, recycler, and beekeeper. I know that my small actions alone don't have a dramatic effect on the environment. However, let me speak on behalf of the bees. I started keeping bees about 12 years ago when I began to understand the threat they were under. And on a selfish level, as a gardener I believed they would be beneficial as pollinators. We were successful ensuring the survival of our bees until around five years ago, when we could see that colony strength was declining despite our best efforts. Reduced colony strength means that survival through the winter months is more difficult, and for the last few years, they have not survived. Of course, we know there are many things that may be contributing to honeybee declines—as well as that of other pollinators—but the stresses are exacerbated by pollution and changes in our climate. Pollinators like our bees are essential to maintaining our food supplies, and therefore, our very survival. The positive impacts of RGGI can help to turn around much of the destruction we have wrought on our environment.

I cannot share the kinds of statistics and estimates that many who are testifying today will share with you, but I do believe in science and the solid evidence of damage we have done to our world. I can speak as a concerned human being and a person of faith who believes I am called to love my neighbor and to care for the earth. I pray that you will listen to the experts with your heads and to people like me with your hearts—because it will take both their expertise and our passion, combined with tools like RGGI, to make our Commonwealth a more livable place for us and generations to come.