August 20, 2015

To members of the Michigan Senate Energy and Technology Committee:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we thank you for considering this testimony and for the time you've invested in charting a path forward on Michigan's energy policy.

We write today on behalf of the MI Air MI Health Coalition, a diverse set of health organizations and health professionals that are opposed to Senate Bill 438. The signatories below are the doctors, nurses, scientists and public health officials who work every day to keep Michigan families healthy and safe. This legislation does not do enough to take health into account. It will increase dangerous air pollution and put the health of our most vulnerable residents at risk – including children, seniors, and low-income populations.

The decisions made by the Senate Energy and Technology Committee impact public health in Michigan. Senate Bill 438 will recklessly endanger those already suffering from life-threatening chronic diseases, including respiratory and heart disease. By redefining "clean energy" to include burning coal and trash, these bills will derail Michigan's successful progress toward transitioning to cleaner sources of energy, sources that will reduce pollution and give Michiganders cleaner air to breathe.

We support an energy policy that focuses on moving away from burning coal and other toxic substances, and toward cleaner, renewable sources of energy. Doing so will reduce illness, rein in health care costs, and save lives. SB 438 does not pave a path for Michigan to reduce our dependence on coal. Burning coal emits dangerous levels of toxic substances into our air, including particulate matter, mercury, sulfur dioxide, arsenic and lead. These toxic substances are linked to four of the five leading causes of mortality in the U.S.: heart disease, cancer, stroke, and chronic respiratory diseases, such as asthma. Polluted air has officially been designated as a carcinogen, causing specifically lung and urinary tract/bladder cancer. And one study published in December 2014 showed the first link between maternal exposure to particulate matter during pregnancy and a child's future diagnosis of autism.

Dismissing the opportunity to improve public health in Michigan by advancing our state's highly successful energy efficiency programs, SB 438 instead places a further burden on our health by continuing our reliance on dirty sources of energy. Consider the facts:

- Michigan's asthma rate is nearly 25% higher than the national average. Since 2001, our asthma rates have consistently gotten worse.
- Michigan currently ranks 5th in the nation in premature deaths, hospital admissions, and heart attacks attributed to coal-fired power plant pollution.
- More specifically, the pollution from Michigan's nine oldest coal-fired power plants has been linked to 68,000 cases of asthma attacks and 180 premature deaths each year.

- Michigan's lung cancer rate is higher than 33 other states, and we have the 6th highest percentage of residents living with cardiovascular disease.

These figures translate to mean that we spend more on health care in Michigan than comparable states, due in part to poor outdoor air quality linked to pollution from dirty energy sources. We urge you to broaden the scope of the concept of "affordability" to include money spent to care for those suffering from the health effects of air pollution. In fact, each year we incur more than $1.3 billion in health care costs and damages related to the air quality impacts of coal pollution.

We pay for it when a child goes to the emergency room for poorly controlled asthma. And we pay for it through our state budget and the Medicaid program. We have worked with the Michigan Department of Community Health to determine that the State of Michigan spends between $80 and $90 million per year on asthma care for the Medicaid population alone. This is just one chronic disease exacerbated by outdoor air pollution and our over-reliance on dirty sources of energy. SB 438 ignores the profound health costs our families and state budget could be strapped with should we take this dangerous step backward.

A healthier and cleaner future is possible. Michigan energy policy should strive to increase our energy efficiency and renewable energy sources. This will ensure that the 229,000 children and 750,000 adults in Michigan with asthma can breathe cleaner and healthier air. This has a clear return on investment: by reducing the instances of illness related to pollution, we can cut down on lost productivity from kids and adults missing school or work because they are in the hospital from asthma complications. We can also significantly reduce the amount of uncompensated care costs that hospitals and health clinics have to assume as a result.

Thank you for considering the public health voice on behalf of Michigan's most vulnerable residents: children, seniors, and low-income populations. We urge you to keep the health of Michiganders at the front of mind as you continue the conversation on our state's future energy policy. We welcome the opportunity to be a resource to the committee. Please do not hesitate to contact us with questions.

Signed,

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