September 1, 2016

Secretary Grumbles
Maryland Department of the Environment
Email: ben.grumbles@maryland.gov

Chairman Hughes
Maryland Public Service Commission
Email: kevin.hughes@maryland.gov

Dear Secretary Grumbles and Chairman Hughes:

On behalf of Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility (Chesapeake PSR), I am writing to urge you as Maryland’s members of the Board of Directors of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), to support several important changes to RGGI as part of the 2016 Program Review. These changes will help address climate change and improve the health of Maryland residents.

Specifically, Chesapeake PSR urges you to support current efforts to:

• Adopt a regional cap on carbon from power plants that declines by 5% annually between 2020-2030;
• Implement a cap correction to account for the excessive quantity of banked allowances;
• Restructure or remove the Cost Containment Reserve to ensure that emission reduction targets align with the cap; and,
• Complete an environmental justice analysis that considers both the pollution and development impacts of policy proposals currently under consideration by RGGI states.

Strengthening RGGI is a Health Issue

As an organization of doctors and other health professionals and health advocates, we strongly support the RGGI program. Our members and supporters see the adverse health consequences of air pollution from fossil fuel electricity generation
every day. In Maryland, for example, coal-fired power plants are one of the largest sources of both carbon dioxide and air pollutants. Maryland’s coal-fired power plants produce toxic pollution, including nitrogen oxide compounds, sulfur dioxides, fine particulate matter, and volatile organic compounds, all of which cause significant health problems, particularly in the most vulnerable populations. The pollution from these plants damages our cardiovascular and respiratory health and threatens healthy development of our children.¹

Major medical societies throughout the world agree that climate change is one of the great health threats of our time.² We know that the CO₂ emissions that RGGI is designed to control are one of the major causes of climate change. In surveys conducted by three separate U.S. medical professional societies, a significant majority of surveyed physicians concurred that climate change is having a direct impact on the health of their patients, and that physicians anticipate even greater climate-driven adverse human health impacts in the future.³

In Maryland, we are already seeing the effects of climate change. The last 15 months have been the hottest on record. This heat threatens our most vulnerable citizens, such as the elderly and low-income residents that do not have the means to stay cool. This problem is exacerbated in Baltimore by the urban heat island effect. High temperatures also lead to poorer air quality, and climate change causes rising sea levels, an increase in extreme weather events, and flooding and infrastructure damage. It also increases the spread of vector borne diseases, such as Lyme and Zika, and threatens our food systems. Examples of the health risks caused by climate change are all around us. The flooding in Ellicott City was the most devastating in the city’s history, causing two deaths and a massive sewage spill into the Patapsco River. Between June and August, the Air Quality Index was code orange or red sixteen times, meaning the air was unhealthy to breathe for either sensitive groups or the general public on those days.

A Strong RGGI is Good for the Economy and Good for Human Health

RGGI has been a success in reducing climate and air pollution and strengthening the economy of Maryland. Since the program’s start, RGGI states have lowered climate pollution by 16% more than non-RGGI states, and the economic growth in RGGI

¹ Chesapeake PSR, Coal-fired Power: An Unhealthy Energy Choice for Maryland, 2015
³ AMA Advocacy Update, Supreme Court Case Could Have Major Health Implications, April 28, 2016.
states has outpaced the growth in non-RGGI states by 3.6%. The proceeds from RGGI help to strengthen clean, renewable energy programs and energy efficiency programs for low-income families.

Please continue to support a strong RGGI program. Independent analysis shows that Maryland and other RGGI states can achieve the 5% annual reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, while creating tens of thousands of new clean energy jobs and strengthening our economy. The proposal to implement a cap correction and to restructure or remove the Cost Containment Reserve will strengthen the integrity of the cap reduction goals. The environmental justice analysis will help ensure the meaningful involvement of all residents in energy choices.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

Timothy Whitehouse
Executive Director

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