November 21, 2017

Statement regarding Chesapeake PSR’s decision to support 100% clean renewable electricity for Maryland by 2035

The evidence for dangerous and accelerating disruption of our climate system poses unacceptable and potentially irreversible risks to the health and safety of citizens in our state and around the globe. To prevent unmanageable health crises and urge true leadership in addressing global warming, Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility (Chesapeake PSR) is now calling for a rapid transition to 100% clean renewable electricity in Maryland by 2035, a critical step forward on the path to a clean renewable energy-based economy.

As reported in the Fourth National Climate Assessment (NCA4) released in November 2017, “Annual average temperature over the contiguous United States has increased by 1.8°F (1.0°C) for the period 1901–2016” and “...over the next few decades (2021–2050), annual average temperatures are expected to rise by about 2.5°F for the United States, relative to the recent past (average from 1976–2005), under all plausible future climate scenarios..” The scientific community has stated clearly and unequivocally that this warming is primarily caused by rising concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere due to human activities. Carbon dioxide from fossil fuel combustion is one of the most important of these greenhouse gases.

The NCA4 further states, “The global atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) concentration has now passed 400 parts per million (ppm), a level that last occurred about 3 million years ago, when both global average temperature and sea level were significantly higher than today.” To put this in perspective, pre-industrial levels of carbon dioxide were approximately 280 ppm. We are now living in atmospheric conditions unprecedented during human existence on this planet.

Rising global temperatures are already having devastating human consequences in the United States and around the globe. Hurricanes, flooding, droughts and fires have killed or displaced millions of people this year alone. Rising carbon dioxide levels are even adversely affecting the nutrient content of food. To bring atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations down and
stabilize temperatures, dramatic cuts in emissions from multiple sectors of society will be required, while steps are taken simultaneously to increase biological carbon sequestration.

Maryland is one of the most vulnerable states in the U.S. to climate change. It is also one of the wealthiest states, both in terms of financial and human resources, and is therefore well-positioned to take a leadership role in transforming all sectors that adversely impact climate. The electricity sector is a critical starting point. Chesapeake PSR has worked for many years to support incremental efforts to increase the percentage of clean renewable energy being used to generate electricity consumed in our state. We advocated for increased renewable energy both to reduce direct negative health impacts from pollution from combustion sources and to begin to address climate change. However, the current approach is inadequate. It is time to set goals commensurate with the urgency of the climate crisis. We therefore support a goal of Maryland achieving 100% clean renewable electricity by 2035.

Given the rapid acceleration of global warming and the risk of reaching tipping points beyond which return to a stable climate system could become impossible, Chesapeake PSR is committed to working with coalition partners to expedite the transformation of our energy systems in Maryland. We believe the technology now exists to move rapidly toward an economy based on solar, wind, and other clean renewable sources of energy. This will have immediate benefits to the health of Maryland residents, as well as benefits to the climate system. We further believe this transformation can and must be carried out in a way that protects the most vulnerable citizens of our state and the workers who have built the current fossil fuel-based economy.

Time is of the essence. Fossil fuels must be phased out as quickly as possible, beginning with the electricity sector. It is clear the federal government will not be leading this effort so states must act now. Nothing less than the future of civilization is at stake.

*Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility (Chesapeake PSR)* works in Maryland to bring a strong medical and health perspective to efforts to address climate change, reduce risks from nuclear weapons and nuclear energy, reduce human exposure to toxic chemicals and pollutants, and promote issues of social justice.