



For Immediate Release

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Students Ask Massachusetts Government to “Do More” on Climate Change *Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection Held Public Meeting on Boston Students’ Climate Change Petition for Rulemaking.*

Boston, Massachusetts – Today, a group of Boston-area students submitted public testimony to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), urging the State to protect Massachusetts’ climate system and shorelines by adequately protecting the atmosphere, a public trust resource upon which all Massachusetts residents rely on for their health and safety. Last November, in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, several hundred students from Boston high schools, as well as Boston College Law School, filed a climate change petition for rulemaking with the DEP.

The Boston students’ petition formally requesting specific state regulations is part of one of the most remarkable legal strategies on climate crisis to date. The strategy was launched on May 4, 2011 as part of the TRUST Campaign, in which youth filed legal actions in 49 states and against the federal government to compel reductions of CO₂ emissions that will help restore the health of essential natural resources threatened by the climate crisis. The legal actions rely upon the long established legal principle of the Public Trust Doctrine that requires all branches of government to protect and maintain certain shared resources fundamental for human health and survival.

“The Public Trust Doctrine speaks to one of the most essential purposes of democratic governments: protecting natural resources for the common benefit of the citizenry,” said Boston College Law Professor Zyg Plater. “Since the origination of the doctrine over 1500 years ago, governments have had an obligation to protect crucial natural resources, including the air. Massachusetts is a leader among states, but it must do more to protect the future of our young citizens.”

The petition acknowledges that Massachusetts is a national leader in taking initiative to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but urges the State to commit to additional emission reductions that the DEP has said are feasible economically and technologically. DEP plans to reduce state emissions 25% below 1990 levels by 2020, but a report it issued said it could reduce state emissions by as much as 35%.

The students want those extra emissions reductions. “Our future is literally on the line. Our shorelines are on the line. Our food and transportation systems and our public safety will be impacted by these decisions,” said Walter Thom, one of the student petitioners. “If we can reduce our emissions to levels that experts say is necessary to protect our climate system, we need to do that. There’s too much at stake.”

The Massachusetts DEP has yet to adopt the mandatory regulations called for in the Global Warming Solutions Act, but by initiating rulemaking in response to the students’ petition the Department could begin that required process and commit to the emission reductions that are scientifically defensible. The

Department also has constitutional authority and duty to adopt the petition's proposed rules. The students' petition references Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution which states that, "[t]he people shall have the right to clean air."

"These youth never cease to inspire me in their efforts to protect their future," said Cate Arnold, an advisor to the Youth Climate Action Network and a teacher at Boston Latin. "My hope is that those in positions of power will listen to these youth and live up to their responsibilities."

***Our Children's Trust** is a nonprofit organization advocating for urgent emissions reductions on behalf of youth and future generations, who have the most to lose if emissions are not reduced. OCT is spearheading the international human rights and environmental TRUST Campaign to compel governments to safeguard the atmosphere as a "public trust" resource. We use law, film, and media to elevate their compelling voices. Our ultimate goal is for governments to adopt and implement enforceable science-based Climate Recovery Plans with annual emissions reductions to return to an atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration of 350 ppm. www.ourchildrenstrust.org/*

***iMatter** is a youth-led campaign of the nonprofit group, Kids vs Global Warming, that is focused on mobilizing and empowering youth to lead the way to a sustainable and just world. We are teens and moms and young activists committed to raising the voices of the youngest generation to issue a wake-up call to live, lead and govern as if our future matters. www.imattercampaign.org/*

***WITNESS** is the global pioneer in the use of video to promote human rights. We empower people to transform personal stories of abuse into powerful tools for justice, promoting public engagement and policy change. In partnership with the iMatter TRUST Campaign we seek to bring visibility to the challenges our youth already face because of the changing climate and call for a massive assault on fossil fuel emissions. Without an all-out assault, effects will range from drought to disease; from food shortages to tainted water supplies; from the loss of homes due to floods, erosion and fire to massive relocations. The human rights challenge is most succinctly summarized by Mary Robinson, "Climate change will, in short, have immense human consequences." WITNESS partnered on this campaign in hopes that predictions will not become realities. To view the stories from our youth included in the TRUST Series go to www.witness.org/campaigns/all-campaigns/imatter or www.ourchildrenstrust.org.*

***Youth CAN** was founded in January of 2007 by students at the Boston Latin School as a network of school-based, youth-led, extra-curricular climate actions clubs. <http://www.blyouthcan.org/>*

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