

May 7, 2014

To members of the Michigan House of Representatives  
Energy Policy Committee:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we thank you for considering this testimony and for the time and consideration you are giving to 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 House Bill 4297. This legislation is a step in the wrong direction for Michigan. The signatories of this letter are the doctors, nurses, scientists and public health officials who work every day to keep Michigan families healthy and safe. We support an energy policy that focuses on moving away from burning coal or other substances, and toward more clean, renewable sources of energy. Doing so will reduce illness, rein in health care costs, and save lives.

We don't often talk about health and energy policy at the same time. But it is time that we recognize that the two are connected. The legislation before you is irresponsible and harmful to public health. By attempting to reclassify burning hazardous waste as renewable energy, it hijacks Michigan's successful progress to transition to cleaner sources of energy – sources that reduce pollution and give Michigan cleaner and healthier air.

As you are undoubtedly aware, Michigan still gets more than half of its electricity from burning 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 also officially been labeled a carcinogen to humans, tied to lung and urinary tract/bladder cancer. Further, there is new evidence to suggest that pregnant women that are exposed to outdoor air pollution are more likely to have a child diagnosed with autism.

Relying on dirty sources of energy that pollute our air is a burden on our health. Consider the facts:

- Michigan's asthma rate is 10% higher than the national average.
- Michigan currently [ranks 5<sup>th</sup> 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.

In our conversations about energy policy, we talk a lot about affordability. We agree that we need to find solutions that don't overly burden the pocketbooks of the average Michigan family. But it is time to broaden the scope of our discussion of affordability – it's more than just the "balance due" number on a monthly utility bill.

We pay for our current energy policy in a myriad number of other ways. 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

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*Sources:*

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