



GBPSR Testimony in Support of S2197, “An Act to prevent biomass energy to protect the air we breathe.”

We at Greater Boston Physicians for Social Responsibility (GBPSR), a group of nationally-recognized experts in public health, cancer epidemiology, occupational medicine, environmental health, emergency medicine, disaster preparedness, and the health effects of climate change, are writing to urge our legislators to support the above legislation, which rejects DOER’s proposed rule changes expanding renewable energy incentives for wood burning power plants. **S2197 appropriately removes biomass** from the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) and Alternative Energy Standard (APS) and thus avoids spending millions of dollars of taxpayer money to subsidize an industry that is damaging to health and the climate.

We urge you to support this legislation for the following reasons:

- The proposed changes to the Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard would significantly weaken Massachusetts’ stringent air quality standards. This would, in essence, abandon many scientifically sound and cost-effective public health protections that for years have safeguarded health in the Commonwealth. The Baker administration’s changes roll back important environmental and public health protections adopted in 2012 that make Massachusetts’ RPS standards the strongest in the nation.
- DOER is proposing sweeping changes that will allow inefficient and polluting wood-burning biomass power plants to once again qualify for renewable energy incentives.
- Biomass power plants are not “clean energy”: they emit large quantities of harmful air pollution and are damaging to our climate and our forests: per unit of energy produced, burning wood results in 150% more carbon dioxide than burning coal and 300-400% more carbon dioxide than burning natural gas.
- DOER’s proposed rule changes would allow existing inefficient biomass power plants in Maine, New Hampshire and elsewhere to collect millions of dollars in renewable energy subsidies paid for by Massachusetts residents through their electric bills.

Biomass fuels are only theoretically renewable. While more trees can be planted, the reality is that it takes mere seconds to burn a tree whereas it takes decades to centuries for a tree to regrow. Biomass fuels are also unsafe, increasing levels of air pollutants and carbon emissions. Biomass has been advertised as a carbon-neutral energy solution because of the ability to plant more trees for carbon sequestration, but this is clearly a false premise.

According to public health expert Dr. Philip Landrigan, Director of the Global Observatory on Pollution and Health at Boston College, “Burning biomass kills 2.3 million people a year worldwide.”

Air Pollution

Weakening Massachusetts' stringent air quality standards translates, in essence, to abandoning our scientifically sound and cost-effective public health protections that for years have safeguarded health in the Commonwealth and resulted in substantial reductions in pollution-related disease and death.

In addition, the emissions created by this rule change will further increase climate-damaging emissions of greenhouse gases at a time when scientists are telling us to urgently slash these emissions. This is shortsighted and reckless.

Air pollution kills more than 10,000 people in the United States and 600 persons in Massachusetts each year — a disproportionate number of them in low-income and minority communities. These men, women and children die prematurely from diseases that include myocardial infarction, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer and pneumonia — diseases that could be prevented by reducing air pollution levels in the Commonwealth.

Emissions of fine particulates and other air pollutants from this rule change will undoubtedly increase this toll of disease and premature death, magnifying social injustice and increasing Medicare costs.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The World Health Organization has estimated that without reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, approximately 230,000 to 250,000 excess deaths per year from 2030 to 2050 will be attributable to climate change - and this estimate is considered conservative.

Our Governor has stated publicly that he intends to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions in Massachusetts by 2050. His Department of Public Health has spoken out against structural racism. These are goals that we endorse, but this proposed rule change goes in exactly the opposite direction of both goals.

Another important negative consequence of this rule change that will affect all ratepayers across the Commonwealth is that it will force Massachusetts ratepayers to pay higher premiums for dirty, unsustainable energy.

Massachusetts is in a unique position to continue to be a leader in environmental and climate justice in the nation. We urge our legislators to safeguard the health of all Massachusetts residents, protect our air quality and support this legislation that will remove biomass from the Renewable Portfolio Standard and Alternative Energy Standard and remove subsidies for biomass. This act literally protects the air we in the Commonwealth and other New England States breathe--and it makes its citizens healthier as a result.

Thank you for your consideration.



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Chair of the Board

Greater Boston Physicians for Social Responsibility