



June 28th, 2023

*Thank you to the Chairs and Members of the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy for hearing my testimony.*

I am Dr. Brita Lundberg, Chair of the Board at Greater Boston Physicians for Social Responsibility, testifying in support of:

**S.2136/H.3210 An Act to remove woody biomass from the greenhouse gas emissions standard for municipal lighting plants; and**

**S.2137/H.3211, An Act limiting the eligibility of woody biomass as an alternative energy supply.**

GBPSR is a group of nationally-recognized experts in public health, cancer epidemiology, occupational medicine, and environmental health. Through our seminal reports on environmental health threats, including [In Harms Way](#), the [Pediatric Environmental Toolkit](#), and [Environmental Threats to Healthy Aging, No Room to Breathe](#); a [2022 educational forum](#) on the connection between air pollution, climate change and health; and in collaboration with government entities including the EPA and ATSDR as well as community allies, GBPSR has worked to raise awareness among the medical community and the general public regarding the threats to human health posed by air pollution.

The above bills will ensure that **biomass does not qualify as a “non-carbon emitting” energy source and will not qualify for taxpayer subsidies through the APS.**

This legislation will save millions of dollars of taxpayer money that would otherwise subsidize an industry that is damaging to health and the health expenditures that result from the excess air pollution this industry generates.

Biomass combustion is hazardous to human health. Burning biofuels increases air pollution and pollution-related disease and creates climate-damaging greenhouse gases at a time when scientists are telling us urgently to slash these emissions.

Burning woody biomass emits more carbon pollution than the most polluting fossil fuel, coal. [Per unit of energy produced](#), biomass carbon emissions are 45% higher than those from coal and 2-3 times higher than natural gas.

Although burning wood has been touted as a carbon-neutral energy solution because trees are, [in theory, replaceable](#), the reality is that it takes mere minutes to burn a tree, whereas it takes decades to centuries for a tree to regrow and sequester the carbon that is released when a tree is burned.

Additionally, burning biomass, whether for electricity, heat, or other purposes, creates high levels of particulate matter air pollution. PM 2.5 pollution is linked to a wide range of serious health conditions, including increased rates of lung disease, heart disease, cancer, pregnancy complications, and premature death. In one European [study](#), PM 2.5 pollution from residential wood burning was estimated to account for 232 premature deaths per year in the city of Oslo.

In the United States, air pollution kills [between 100,000-200,000 people](#) each year; 2,800 of those deaths, according to a [recent study](#) from Boston College, occur in Massachusetts. A disproportionate number of those

most affected by the negative health sequelae of air pollution live in low-income and minority communities. Many of these deaths could be prevented by reducing air pollution levels in the Commonwealth.

The aggressive harvest of trees to burn as biofuel is destroying a resource critical to mitigating the climate crisis. In addition to producing excess air pollution, burning wood for energy also exhausts a key carbon sink: forests. Forests absorb carbon dioxide and other air pollutants, and serve to cool the earth, replenish aquifers, and decrease land erosion and soil loss due to drought.

*According to now Governor and then Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey—“Biomass energy—and policies that subsidize it—exacerbate climate and environmental justice harms, both by immediately releasing greenhouse gas and other pollutant emissions from burning wood and by damaging or eliminating our forest and natural lands, which serve as critical carbon sinks as we seek to achieve the Commonwealth’s aggressive and necessary climate goals.”*

In sum—

- Biomass is not “clean energy”: burning biomass emits large quantities of harmful air pollution;
- Biomass damages health and results in millions of dollars in excess medical expenditures that the Commonwealth must cover due to excess heart attacks, stroke and asthma from preventable particulate matter air pollution;
- Massachusetts residents should not subsidize, through their electric bills, inefficient biomass power plants that harm their health;
- Truly renewable technologies like wind and solar are now less expensive than fossil fuels and biomass; these technologies are readily available and expanding rapidly.

Massachusetts can be a leader in safeguarding the health of all Massachusetts residents by protecting the air we breathe. **I urge our legislators to support the above legislation that** will increase the ability of those who live and work in the Commonwealth to contribute to society and live meaningful, rewarding lives.

Thank you for your consideration.



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