

# **SPRINGFIELD CLIMATE JUSTICE COALITION**

c/o Arise for Social Justice  
38 School Street, Springfield, MA 01105

August 13, 2020

## **Re: Amendments to House Climate Legislation (H.4933), Section 15**

To the Members of Western Mass House and Senate Delegation:

On behalf of the Springfield Climate Justice Coalition, a coalition of over 30 diverse organizations, we are writing to request the removal of a terrible provision in the House climate bill that promotes biomass energy as a “non-carbon emitting” energy source for municipal light plants. We urge you to reach out to your colleagues on the conference committee to correct this language as if our children’s lives depended on it – because they do.

Since 2014, our coalition of community, social, civic, and public health organizations, faith based groups, and businesses has brought together organizations across the City of Springfield to take on the issues of climate change and environmental justice at the local level, out of a deep concern for the future of our environment and public health. One of our top priorities has been to ensure that people of all ages can breathe clean air.

We want to encourage MLP's to purchase clean energy; however, the definition in this bill would allow the dirtiest of all power plants to qualify for a program that’s intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This is unconscionable from both a climate perspective and an environmental justice perspective and will harm the people in Springfield first and worst.

We believe this language was inserted specifically to benefit the developers of the Palmer Renewable Energy plant, a 35-megawatt wood burning power plant proposed for East Springfield. Despite strong community opposition, Palmer is seeking to build in a predominantly Black and brown community whose residents are already suffering disproportionately from asthma and other pollution-borne illnesses, lack of access to healthcare, and are now at increased risk from Covid-19.

Far from being “non-carbon emitting,” the Palmer biomass plant would emit nearly half a million tons of carbon dioxide per year. In addition, the Palmer plant would make Springfield’s air even more unhealthy to breathe by emitting hundreds of tons per year of fine particulates, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, and other harmful air pollutants. Springfield already has been named “Asthma Capital of the Nation” based on its sky-rocketing rates of asthma, emergency room visits, and asthma-related deaths. How many more seniors, children, and people with health ailments will die prematurely if this plant is built? Why should we die to provide cheap power for wealthy communities in the eastern part of the state? There is no Western Mass representation on the Conference Committee so we are counting on you to have our backs.

For years, we thought the Palmer plant would not proceed, since it was too dirty and inefficient to qualify for millions of dollars in renewable energy subsidies under MA's Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS). Then last year ENE started encouraging MLPs in eastern Massachusetts to enter into long term power purchasing agreements with Palmer, claiming that the plant would likely be eligible for the RPS by the end of 2019. It appears that ENE knew before we did that the Baker Administration was proposing to weaken the RPS regulations for biomass eligibility. Our community pushed back hard against those changes and the rules still haven't been released. But this legislation does an end run around the RPS rules entirely and would make the Palmer biomass plant eligible for these lucrative MLP contracts by simply falsely declaring all biomass power plants to be non-carbon emitting.

This is crazy and will harm our community. We don't need this. As our coalition wrote in a [letter to ENE last year](#), *"the apparent assumption by ENE and PRE that power plant developers get to define and legislate away the realities of pollution and climate change for their own financial benefit is deeply repugnant to frontline communities, scientists, and environmental activists."*

We strongly object to establishing a new standard for MLPs that would promote polluting energy from power plants that do not meet the same standards as the state's RPS and Clean Energy Standard. We don't think biomass incineration should be incentivized in any of MA's clean energy programs. But if it must be included in this new MLP standard, it should at least be limited to highly efficient biomass power plants that qualify for the MA RPS program.

We urge you to speak to your colleagues on the conference committee and tell them that this is an environmental injustice of the highest order. Springfield deserves the same protections as everyone else. The House may not have been aware of the implications of this language when it passed its climate bill last month. We hope we can count on you to work with your colleagues in the conference committee to correct this language before it becomes law.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Springfield Climate Justice Coalition  
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Co-signers:

ARISE for Social Justice  
Pioneer Valley Project  
Neighbor To Neighbor  
Unitarian Universalist Society of Greater Springfield  
Longmeadow Pipeline Awareness Group

Community Action Works  
Climate Action Now  
Sunrise of Western Mass  
New North Citizens Council  
Public Health Institute of Western Mass