

February 1, 2006

Testimony of Tom Hucker, Executive Director of Progressive Maryland, on SB 154/HB 189

Good morning Madam Chair and members of the Committee. My name is Tom Hucker, and I'm the Executive Director of Progressive Maryland.

Our 25,000 individual members and fifty organizational affiliates stand behind this commonsense legislation. Global warming is an especially serious threat to Maryland, and we must be proactive in finding solutions. Maryland has let other states -- headed by both Republican and Democratic governors -- take the lead in fighting global warming. Every year, more states are passing initiatives to support renewable energy. Most recently, seven Eastern states formed the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). Led by Republican Governor George Pataki from New York, this initiative has created (promoted) inexpensive opportunities to reduce carbon emissions from power plants.

Maryland must join this fight. With over 3,100 miles of coastline, Maryland is particularly vulnerable to global warming. The Environmental Protection Agency projects that Maryland could experience up to three feet of sea level rise, causing erosion along the coast, major property damage, and massive loss of wetlands throughout the Chesapeake Bay. Higher temperatures also increase the spread of infectious diseases and exacerbate air pollution problems such as smog. It is time to take action to stop this growing global threat.

Moreover, Pollution from under-regulated coal-fired power plants causes approximately 687 premature deaths, 17,325 asthma attacks, and 101,977 lost workdays in Maryland each year, and contributes to the "dead zones" in the Chesapeake Bay. And over 140,000 Maryland children have asthma.

This bill would reduce emissions of carbon dioxide as well as mercury, sulfur, and nitrogen from Maryland's old, coal-fired power plants. Governor Ehrlich's "Clean Power Rule" is not the solution. The governor's plan is only a rule and not a law and the lack of carbon dioxide regulation in the Governor's "rule" is entirely unacceptable. Fortunately, the Healthy Air Act remedies this grave oversight.

Contrary to popular belief, the cost of regulating carbon dioxide is quite reasonable. By joining the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), Maryland could see a 10 percent reduction in CO2 emissions by 2018 at an individual plant cost of approximately \$2 million a year. This is less expensive than regulating any of Ehrlich's three pollutants, and brings many benefits, such as cost-savings for small businesses. I hope you understand, regardless of what the power companies say, that there is no risk of brownouts or surging prices. Seven states would not enter into an agreement that carried risks of job loss or plant closure. They know that regulating carbon is not only the right thing to do but also the sensible and affordable thing to do.

Governor Ehrlich has failed to act to protect Maryland from global warming. Given the importance of this issue, we cannot afford to sit on the sidelines. Our members are counting on you to take leadership on this critical issue and support the four-pollutant Healthy Air Act this session. We urge a favorable report.