



Partners for a Healthier Community, Inc.

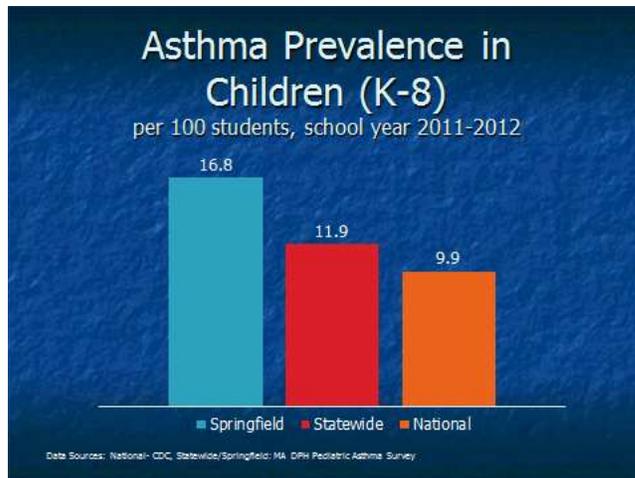
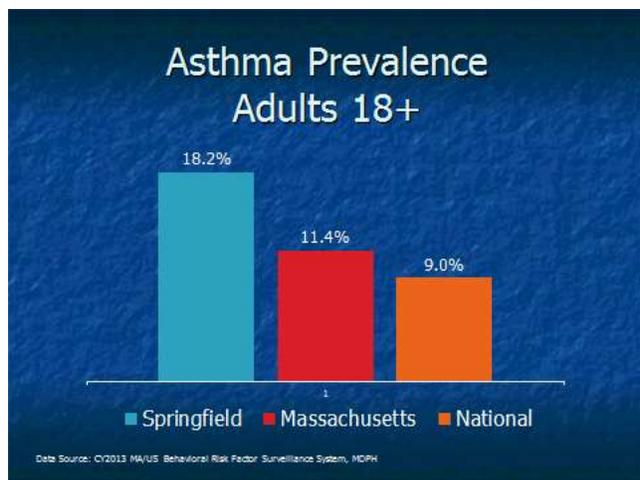


## **Testimony for the Springfield Public Health Council – Public Hearing on Proposed Biomass Plant Site Assignment January 20, 2016**

The proposed biomass plant is likely to have negative health impacts as a result of increased air pollution from incineration as well as from an increase in near roadway air pollution from truck traffic to and from the plant. Given this information, we believe that a Health Impact Assessment is needed to assess the potential health effects of the proposed biomass plant and make recommendations for responses to improve health. In particular, it could help quantify impacts on populations already overburdened with disparities.

Partners for a Healthier Community is the Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts. Since 2007 we have led the Pioneer Valley Asthma Coalition, bringing together organizations and individuals to address the environmental causes of high local asthma rates and improve health and management of asthma. We have had significant policy wins including the placement of anti-idling signs and implementation of green cleaning and other environmental health policies and practices at Springfield Public Schools as well as asthma education and programming at schools that resulted in decreased emergency room visits from school. In the last few years, we have begun to see improvements in asthma health outcomes—fewer kids being hospitalized and improved air quality. We do not want to lose momentum.

Air pollution is a major health danger for children and adults. It is linked to health risks including low birth weight and pre-term birth, asthma attacks, lung cancer, cardiovascular disease, and susceptibility to infections. Asthma is a serious problem in Springfield, with nearly 1 in 5 of children and adults have asthma, significantly higher than statewide and almost double the national rates. An estimated 18% of Springfield residents have asthma, which is 60% higher than the state prevalence (MDPH, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey [BRFSS] 2012).

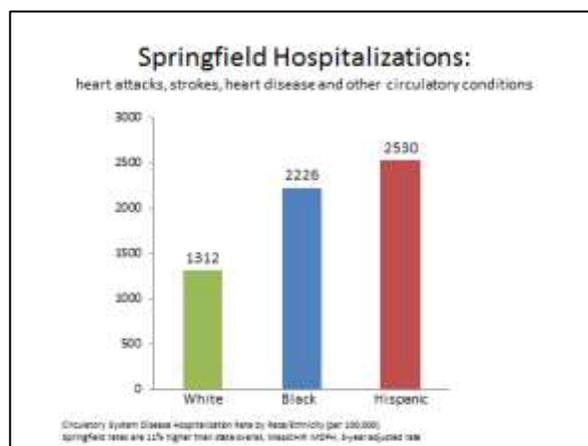
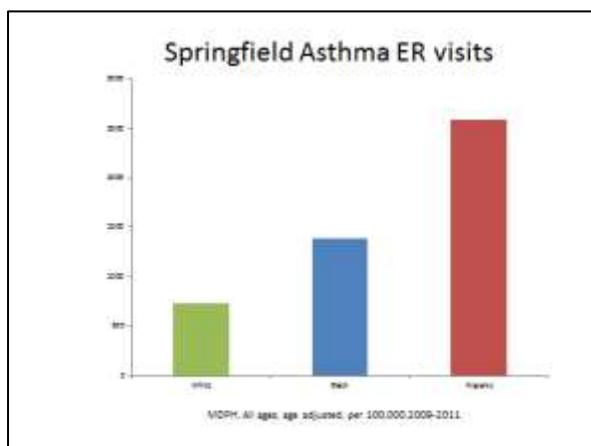


Springfield residents experience large health disparities when compared to the state and the nation. Residents are disproportionately impacted by high rates of asthma, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and hypertension.

Residents experience high morbidity due to asthma with ER visit rates 3 times higher than that of the state and more than double the national rate. ER visit rates for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) are double that of the state rate.

When it comes to cardiovascular disease, we see similar disparities: Springfield residents experience over double the rate of hypertension emergency room visits and 15% higher hospitalization rates for stroke compared to residents statewide. (2009-2011 Emergency Room Visit Dataset, MDPH; Age-adjusted).

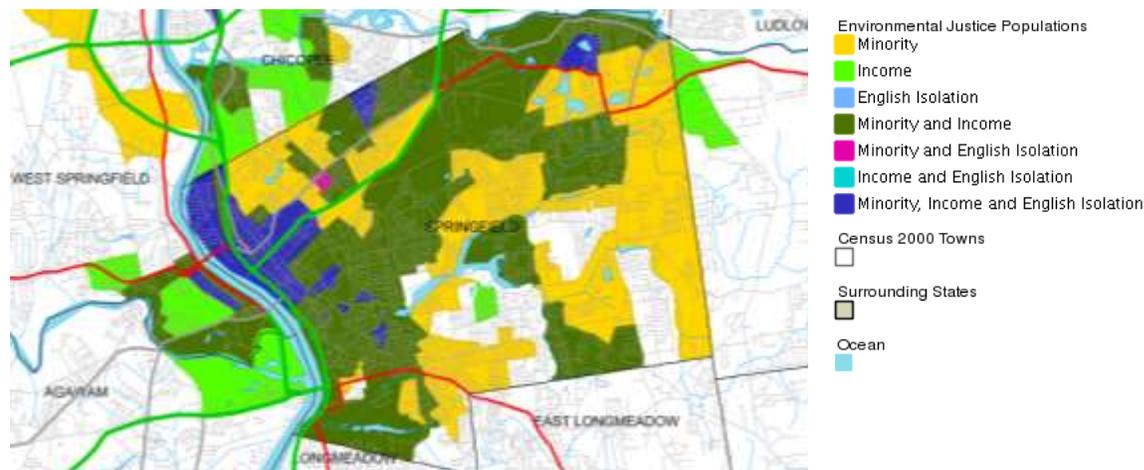
When examining through a lens of race and ethnicity, Springfield Black and Latino residents experience disproportionately poorer health outcomes. Latinos are more than 3 times as likely to end up in the ER for asthma and Blacks are twice as likely than Whites in Springfield. Similarly, Hispanics and Blacks are twice as likely to be hospitalized for cardiovascular diseases.



In addition to the health disparities, the potential environmental and health impacts on Environmental Justice communities should be considered.

Environmental Justice communities are those identified as having vulnerable populations that often experience disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards. The state of Massachusetts' Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs established an EJ policy that aims to reduce potential added environmental burdens on Environmental Justice communities in Massachusetts, specifically focusing on neighborhoods that have a large percentage of low-income, minority racial/ethnic populations, immigrant, or non-English speaking populations.<sup>187</sup>

Based on these measures, much of Springfield is designated as Environmental Justice community. The map below shows the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs mapping of environmental justice communities in Springfield based on low income. It shows that the area near the planned biomass plant includes both low income and minority populations.



Source: [http://maps.massgis.state.ma.us/map\\_ol/ej.php](http://maps.massgis.state.ma.us/map_ol/ej.php); <http://tinyurl.com/jlau2kf>

In fact, Springfield residents are particularly vulnerable to any increase in particulate matter (PM 2.5). According to the EPA's EJSCREEN environmental justice mapping and screening tool, compared to the state and the country, residents in Springfield and within a one mile radius of the proposed plant already experience disproportionate exposure to PM 2.5 because of their status as an environmental justice community. Any increase in PM 2.5, has the potential to increase already serious health disparities and worsen the environmental impact on already vulnerable populations.

