

# Pioneer Valley Asthma Coalition

*Working to improve the quality of life for individuals, families and communities affected by asthma.*



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

I am a Pediatrician and the Chair of the Pioneer Valley Asthma Coalition and co-developer of Asthma Community Health Worker based interventions at The Baystate Medical Center. The Pioneer Valley Asthma Coalition is a multi-organizational, community partnership whose mission is to improve the quality of life for individuals, families and communities affected by asthma in Western Massachusetts' Pioneer Valley. Our coalition includes health care providers like myself, schools, housing organizations, community agencies, academic institutions, community members, and residents.

I spoke to this group almost seven years ago to highlight the adverse health effects that a biomass electricity generation facility would have if placed in the heart of Springfield. Asthma hospitalizations have improved slightly since that time, due to the intensive asthma home visiting initiative, school based asthma programming and work we have done in cooperation with the city to improve indoor air quality in the schools, apartment buildings and city owned buildings. In addition, we've seen improvements in air quality from closing the Mt. Tom coal fired power plant and better EPA regulations for power plants and emissions.

Yet health disparities still persist. According to the MA Department of Public Health, 17% of school children in Springfield have asthma versus 12 % statewide and 10% nationally—the Springfield Schools Nursing Department rates the percentage even higher at 21%. Childhood asthma is the leading cause of school absences which lead to poor academic performance, as well as parents missing work and losing jobs to stay home with their sick children or spend hours in the Emergency Room or hospital.

The scientific community has shown that adverse social determinants in the environment negatively affect the health and well-being of children and these effects persist well into adulthood.

Springfield is still designated as an environmental justice community with high asthma rates. This incineration plant will still place community members at even higher risk. Trucks delivering the 20-ton truckloads of wood to the Palmer Biomass Plant will still worsen these already unhealthy diesel emissions. In addition to contributing to the poor air quality in Springfield overall, these emissions still have the potential to have a particularly harmful impact on the children with asthma in the many schools in close proximity to the plant.

As a physician and on behalf of the Pioneer Valley Asthma Coalition, I would like to express our opposition to the construction of the Palmer Renewable Energy biomass plant at 1000 Page Boulevard, Springfield, MA because of the health risks emissions from the plant pose for community members with asthma in Springfield and surrounding areas.

Springfield still bears a disproportionate burden of asthma. Emissions from this plant and the associated diesel truck deliveries still would place our community members with asthma at increased risk for asthma morbidity and reduced quality of life.

I strongly suggest instead that Springfield look to join existing wind and solar energy projects now being led by the University of Massachusetts and others that will employ community members and provide energy to our community.

It has been stated that this project will bring good jobs to the area and that opposing this plant would hurt the city both by the loss of potential jobs and by huge legal fees that Palmer Renewable Energy will impose during a protracted fight. As I have taught my own children and my patients we need to learn to recognize bullying and stand up to it. We as a community need not allow ourselves to be bullied.

We need to stand up for what is right and fight against what will harm to our community.

There are alternatives.

We have worked well together to improve the health of our community in the past.

I know that we can continue to do this in the future.

We must not allow this plant to be built.

People will get sick,

People will die if we lose this battle.

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