

September 22, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The undersigned Pennsylvania health and medical organizations call on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to protect public health by finalizing an ozone standard that truly protects public health.

We appreciate your recent remarks on the tremendous benefits that the American people experience from federal limits on pollution in the air we breathe. We especially appreciate your recognition that not all communities are impacted equally when it comes to the health burdens of air pollution; we see in our work that many in Pennsylvania suffer disproportionately.

That's why we ask you to direct the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to put in place an ozone standard that fully protects the many Pennsylvanians still at risk from dangerous levels of ozone pollution. As you said in your speech announcing the Clean Power Plan, "Today, an African-American child is more than twice as likely to be hospitalized from asthma; a Latino child is 40 percent more likely to die from asthma." And we must not forget other vulnerable groups at risk, including Pennsylvania's 2,715,645 children and 2,091,330 older adults; 277,174 children and 962,476 adults with asthma; 715,707 people with COPD; and close to 1.7 million people living in poverty. Truly, these communities will not breathe easier until the national ozone pollution limit adequately protects them.

The National Ambient Air Quality Standards are a long-standing tool of the Clean Air Act to drive pollution reduction and protect public health. Under the law, the standards must be set based solely on the level needed to protect public health with an adequate margin of safety. The current ozone standard fails to meet that test. The good news is that EPA now has an opportunity to make things right by adopting a science-based, health-protective standard by October 1, 2015.

Not only will a more protective ozone standard drive cleanup in communities that continue to experience unhealthy air quality, it will also give people at risk from ozone pollution and their families the information they need to take steps to protect their health. For example, under the outdated standard in place now, air quality alerts fail to give parents like you all the information they need to keep their children with asthma safe on days when ozone levels could harm their health. To achieve healthy air for all, EPA must first aim at the right target, by setting an ozone standard based solely on the scientific evidence of what is needed to protect public health.

As always, some oppose this opportunity for progress. The recent barrage of industry ads in Pennsylvania is a perfect example of the continued "scaremongering tactics" that you so powerfully dismissed as "excuses for inaction" in your Clean Power Plan speech. As you said, "Every time America has made progress, it's been despite these kinds of claims. Whenever America has set clear rules and smarter standards for our air, our water, our children's health, we get the same scary stories about killing jobs and businesses and freedom." America need not choose between protecting our health and economic progress. The benefits of cleaning up air pollution have proven time and time again to far outweigh the costs, as you so clearly articulated.

When it comes to ozone pollution, the Clean Air Act allows communities that do not meet the new standard time to plan, adopt, and implement steps to reduce pollution and come into attainment. Measures that communities have put in place to meet the 2008 standard will help them attain an updated standard that protects the most vulnerable. So will existing technology; in some cases, simply turning on existing pollution control technology will help significantly. Finally, federal clean air rules in place now will also help states meet a more protective ozone standard.

By adopting a truly protective ozone pollution limit, America will be closer to fulfilling the purpose of the Clean Air Act: to protect the health of all Americans from deadly dangers in the air we breathe. The science clearly supports a much stronger ozone limit. Please, make the most of this opportunity, and give Pennsylvanians— and all Americans — the protection they deserve.

Sincerely,

Pennsylvania chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Pennsylvania Society for Respiratory Care
Pennsylvania Public Health Association
Pennsylvania State Nurses Association
Physicians for Social Responsibility, Harrisburg
Healthy Communities Partnership of Greater Franklin County

cc: Gina McCarthy, Administrator, U.S. EPA