

Moms Clean Air Force – MATS Testimony

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Elizabeth Hauptman – Michigan Field Organizer

Thank you for the opportunity to share my story.

My name is Elizabeth Hauptman, and I live in Livingston County, Michigan with my husband and our teenage son. I've been advocating with Moms Clean Air Force for over a decade to protect children from the dangers of air pollution—and mercury pollution is one of the most dangerous threats we face.

As a mom, I know there is no safe level of mercury exposure. Mercury is a potent neurotoxin that permanently damages babies' brains. I worry every day about what toxic pollution from coal-fired power plants means for families like mine, for our children's health, and for future generations.

My son has asthma, and we've already experienced the health harms of air pollution firsthand—from wildfire smoke that sent us to urgent care, to the frequent flooding, unprecedented tornadoes in March, and extreme weather all over our beautiful freshwater state. But mercury is an invisible threat—one that quietly builds up in our bodies, especially when we eat contaminated fish. I grew up fishing with my uncle and cousins in Michigan, and I want my son to enjoy that same tradition. But I also want to make sure that tradition doesn't come with a toxic dose of mercury.

That's why I strongly support the Biden administration's recent updates to the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards. These strengthened safeguards hold polluters accountable, especially the coal plants burning lignite in states like Texas and North Dakota—plants that have long evaded stricter rules. The updated standards also require continuous emissions monitoring, so we can finally know what's actually coming out of these smokestacks—not just what's measured during short, outdated tests.

These protections don't just reduce mercury—they also limit arsenic, lead, chromium, and other deadly air toxics that cause cancer, heart attacks, and developmental delays. And by cutting soot and ozone-forming nitrogen oxides, these rules protect every breath we take.

I speak today not just as a concerned mom, but as someone deeply committed to justice. The burden of pollution doesn't fall equally. Communities of color, low-income families, and Indigenous communities—like the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, the Bay Mills Indian Community, and the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians—who rely on

fish as a food source bear the brunt of mercury exposure. Weakening mercury protections would be a betrayal of these communities—and of every parent who wants a healthier future for their child.

Moms Clean Air Force has been fighting for strong mercury standards for over a decade, and we are not backing down now. There is no safe level of mercury. We must uphold and enforce the strongest possible Mercury and Air Toxics Standards to protect our kids, our communities, and our climate.

Thank you.

Vanessa Lynch – Pennsylvania Campaign Coordinator

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Vanessa Lynch. I am the Pennsylvania Campaign Coordinator, and I am here representing the almost 105,000 Moms Clean Air Force Pennsylvania members. I live with my husband and two children in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. As a state with a history of coal extraction and numerous coal fired power plants, I strongly oppose efforts to weaken the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards.

With two of the biggest mercury polluting coal fired power plants located in my state - the [Keystone and Conamaugh electric generating stations](#) - the current requirements for continuous emissions monitoring for coal plants rather than periodic emissions tests, along with the reductions in other health-harming air pollutants, would be a breath of fresh air for local families. Now, these coal fired power plants have requested MATS exemptions via Trump's EPA mercury pollution free pass. No amount of mercury is safe for humans, so why would we allow some of the dirtiest coal plants in the country a free mercury pollution pass?

Moms Clean Air Force has been advocating for strong mercury protections for over a decade. With [86% of women in the country having had at least one child](#), the health needs of pregnant women, the caretakers of our future generations, shouldn't be relegated to a do not eat list.

Mercury is especially dangerous for developing babies and children. After ingestion, mercury can cross the blood-brain and placental barriers, leading to toxic effects on fetal and infant brains. When pregnant women eat contaminated fish, mercury can cause long-term losses in IQ scores, impaired motor function, learning impairments, and behavioral problems in their children. Moms spend so much of our time and energy trying to protect our children, it is frustrating to know simply what you eat will jeopardize your child's health.

Added to the impacts of mercury are the health impacts of the toxic heavy metals associated with coal fired power plants such as lead, arsenic, and chromium which are known to cause fatal heart attacks, cancer, and developmental delays in children.

We know [mercury safeguards significantly decrease mercury pollution with huge health benefits and low costs](#). As this administration works to place an emphasis on family building and encouraging women to have more children, placing women's health and the health of their babies at the forefront of decision-making on mercury and other health-harming air toxics would demonstrate that commitment.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify today. On behalf of Pennsylvania moms, I oppose any attempts to weaken the Mercury and Air Toxics standards.

Shaina Oliver – Colorado Field Organizer

Thank you for listening to my comments today. My name is Shaina Oliver. I'm a Field Coordinator for Moms Clean Air Force/EcoMadres in Colorado. We are more than 1.5 million parents, guardians and caregivers fighting for clean air and a healthy climate across the US, with 43,079 Colorado members. We are united in supporting recent strengthening of the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards that protect communities health from toxic heavy metals that can increase the risk of fatal heart attacks, cancer, and developmental delays in children.

Importantly, I'm an Indigenous Díné Mother of four and we're descendants of the genocide of the "Indian Removal Act" known to the Díné as "The Long Walk of The Navajo". I know from experience as a tribal affiliate of the Navajo Nation that Tribes are historically impacted by the harms of environmental injustices through unjust policies and laws. Because of these environmental injustices, Black, Brown, Indigenous, and low-wealth communities have seen a disproportionately impact on health from pollution. On the Navajo Reservation we've seen greater increases in asthma, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, adverse birth outcomes, mental illness, and premature deaths than the general population. These statistics include me- I'm impacted with asthma and was born with developmental abnormalities. And I am also vulnerable to these health impacts, especially as I get older. My grandfather was a coal plant worker, and he was forced to retire early due to frequent asthma attacks on the work site, he died prematurely of leukemia. In 2019 the Navajo and Hopi Tribal members collectively acknowledged that protecting public health and the environment is important to protecting our children and maternal health for our future mothers.

In Díné/Navajo traditional beliefs it was said to never eat fish, beyond traditions this has become true due to the risk of mercury entering our bodies by consuming fish contaminated by coal power plants. Mercury is a dangerous and deadly neurotoxin that permanently damages babies' brain and fetuses due to how mercury attaches to fatty tissues in the brain, leading to developmental delays, learning disabilities, behavioral problems, and birth defects. Coal-fired power plants release mercury into the air and falls into waterways, where it converts to the neurotoxin methylmercury which accumulates in the fatty tissues in the fish that families eat. Tribal members in the Great Lakes Region, near Rivers, and Coastal Regions rely on the Traditional Ecological Knowledge of their ancestral lands and have a right to have access to clean water, clean air, and good health. It's our right as Indigenous Tribal members of United States to exist and to protect all children's right to a safe environment with access to our ancestral lands and traditional ways of life.

As an Indigenous Díné Mother of four and parents of Colorado, urge you to protect and not weaken the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards that help protect families from the pollution that can cause cancer, lung disease, brain damage in children, and other serious health harms. Our communities deserve to keep up best available technology that reflect the latest innovations in available pollution control technology, building on highly successful and cost-effective MATS practices that protect our children and communities that rely on fishing from multiple harmful hazardous air pollutants beyond mercury like lead, cadmium, arsenic, nickel, and chromium. Thank you for taking time and consideration on this important matter.

Tracy Sabetta – Ohio Field Organizer

Thank you for the opportunity to be with you today. My name is Tracy Sabetta, and I am a field organizer for Moms Clean Air Force in Columbus, Ohio. Moms Clean Air Force has been advocating for strong mercury protections for over a decade. We strongly oppose efforts to weaken the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards, because as you know, there is no safe level of mercury.

Mercury protections limit the release of toxic air pollutants from power plants, helping to prevent exposure to air pollution that has been linked to cancer, respiratory illnesses (like asthma), premature death, and other dangerous health problems. Because communities of color and low-income communities bear the heaviest burden of air pollution, reducing mercury and air toxics pollution is an issue of environmental justice.

As you have heard discussed, most mercury exposure happens through the consumption of fish. People who eat fish more frequently, like recreational fishers, are at higher risk for experiencing health impacts from mercury.

In May of last year, the Ohio Department of Health, in conjunction with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources issued the 2024 [Ohio Sport Fish Consumption Advisory Table](#). The table lists 204 bodies of water in Ohio with consumption advisories for mercury in certain breeds of fish. These bodies of water span from Lake Erie to the Ohio River to smaller bodies of water like Conneaut Creek where it is recommended you eat fish from that creek less than one time per month because of mercury and other pollutants.

When pregnant women eat contaminated fish, mercury can cause long-term impacts such as impaired motor function, learning impairments, and behavioral problems in their children.

It was 26 years ago that my obstetrician cautioned me not to eat fish during my pregnancy. Having grown up on the shores of Lake Erie, fish had been a staple in my diet my entire life. But I did heed the warning and changed my eating habits. Now here we are, one month after my child's 26th birthday, and we are still working to reduce mercury pollution. I am sure my daughter will receive the same warning should she decide to start a family.

Preserving strong mercury and air toxics standards will mean requiring continuous emissions monitoring for coal plants, with facilities tracking their pollution at all times rather than just for short, periodic emissions tests. In a state that continues to rely so heavily on coal, that will go a long way in Ohio.

Once again, on behalf of the more than 91,000 Moms Clean Air Force members in Ohio, I strongly oppose efforts to weaken the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards. Thank you.

Maria Finnegan – National Field Manager

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Maria Finnegan, and I live in the rural town of Dublin, New Hampshire. I'm a National Manager for Moms Clean Air Force, and most importantly, I'm the mother of a four-year-old boy.

I'm here to speak out strongly against any effort to roll back or weaken the recent strengthening of the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards, also known as MATS. As both a mother and a public health advocate, I am deeply concerned about what loosening these

protections would mean for our children's health, especially the most vulnerable among us: babies in the womb, young children, and those living near pollution sources.

Let me be clear: there is no safe level of mercury exposure. Mercury is a potent neurotoxin, and it is especially dangerous during pregnancy and early childhood. When a pregnant woman is exposed to mercury, it can cross both the placental and blood-brain barriers, damaging the developing brain tissue of her baby. This damage can lead to a lifetime of challenges—learning disabilities, behavioral issues, and impaired motor skills. We are talking about permanent, irreversible harm to a child's ability to think, learn, and thrive.

While the foundation of MATS has made a tremendous difference in cleaning up coal plant mercury pollution over the last decade, there was still more work to be done to adequately protect public health. Last year, EPA finalized a stronger version of MATS, implementing protections that would help clean up mercury pollution from dirty lignite coal plants; strengthen protections against numerous other hazardous air pollutants addressed by MATS, including arsenic, lead, and chromium; and require continuous emissions monitoring for coal plants, holding these plants accountable for their pollution.

Pollution emitted from coal plants harms real children in real communities--communities where families fish in local waters, where kids play near power plants, and where moms, like me, try to protect their children from dangers they can't always see. Here in New Hampshire, swimming in our lakes is one of childhood's simplest pleasures. Weakening MATS protections would turn that beloved summer tradition into a potential health risk. It's deeply concerning to me that the [Merrimack Coal Plant in New Hampshire](#) has already received a presidential compliance exemption for MATS, putting children and families in my state at immediate danger.

Among the key benefits of the strengthened version of MATS is an anticipated reduction in children's exposure to fine particle pollution and ozone —pollutants that are linked to pediatric asthma, premature birth, and low birth weight. Children living in polluted areas are more likely to miss school due to asthma attacks and are more likely to end up in the emergency room struggling to breathe. These are not just quality-of-life issues, they are life-and-death issues.

Toxic metals like lead, cadmium, and chromium, which the strengthened version of MATS would also help protect against, are known to cause a host of other problems: lower IQ and developmental scores, anemia, gastrointestinal distress, and even seizures in children. Arsenic exposure is linked to cancer of the skin, bladder, and lungs, and cadmium and

nickel have been associated with adverse birth outcomes and birth defects. Why would we want to expose any children to these dangerous elements?

When I was expecting my child, the doctor told me to limit my fish intake. I remember thinking—what about the mothers who don't have that ability and rely on local fish to feed themselves and their families. Weakening MATS protections would not only reverse hard-fought progress; it would knowingly endanger the health of children across the country. And for what? Power plants have already complied with these regulations. The technology exists. The industry has already invested in pollution control. Weakening these rules now would simply allow polluters to cut corners at the expense of our children's futures.

As a mother, I find that unacceptable. We all have a basic responsibility to leave our children a world that is safer than the one we inherited. But if we choose to allow more mercury and toxic pollution into our air, we are doing the opposite—we are choosing to burden the next generation with more illness, more learning challenges, and fewer opportunities.

I urge you to uphold the strengthened version of the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards, not just because the law demands it, but because morality does. Protecting our children from harmful pollution isn't optional. It's your duty. And it's our right. Thank you.