

House Select Committee on Energy Policy & Oversight
Chairman Jim Hoops
Opponent Testimony on House Bill 798
Testimony of Dr. Aparna Bole
December 3, 2020

Chair Hoops, Vice Chair Abrams, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Select Committee on Energy Policy & Oversight:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 796. My name is Dr. Aparna Bole. I am a pediatrician practicing in Cleveland, Ohio, and a member of the Ohio chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

I am advocating for the immediate repeal of HB6 because it sends us in the wrong direction on the clean energy transition Ohio needs to protect our public health, and because of the corrupt nature of its passage. H.B. 796 fails to do both of those things. I would like to share with you why H.B. 796, just like the bill it fails in trying to fix, H.B. 6, is not just an energy bill, it is a child health bill. Its provisions will harm the health of Ohio's children. In particular, by keeping the roll back of Ohio's Renewable Portfolio and Energy Efficiency Resource Standards and by subsidizing coal-fired power plants, our public health will suffer from worsened air quality--with children bearing the brunt of that burden. In addition, H.B.796 still excludes clean renewable energy sources like wind and solar from consideration as a "clean air resource" and creates barriers to development of new wind farms, further handicapping our state's health-promoting transition to a clean energy future.

Children are particularly vulnerable to the health effects of air pollution for many reasons: they breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults, so they experience higher exposures than adults for the same levels of air pollution, and their organ systems are undergoing critical periods of rapid development. Their lungs continue to develop after birth through much of childhood, and exposure to air pollution can permanently impair lung growth. Children also spend more time outdoors, resulting in higher exposure to outdoor air pollutants.

A recently released report by the Asthma and Allergy Foundation identified six Ohio cities in its top 20 "asthma capitals" in the United States. Ohio's pediatricians have a front-line view of the toll this takes on our kids. In the communities I serve in Cleveland, one in five children has asthma – that is more than twice the national prevalence of childhood asthma. Surface ozone and particulate air pollution from burning fossil fuels both cause and exacerbate chronic lung conditions. Exercise and play are essential parts of children's growth and development, but when air pollution levels are high, we must tell our young patients with asthma that it is unsafe for them to play or exercise outdoors. At the end of this school year, I saw one of my patients for a summer sports physical – he is a little boy who is obese and also has asthma. I high-fived him and his family for signing him up for a sports camp – we had been talking for a while about how physical activity is important for his health. However, I had to provide a caveat: on poor air quality days, he needs to stay inside, because he is at high risk for asthma exacerbation. How unjust, that this child doing what kids should be doing in the summer--playing outside--can't always do that because we haven't ensured that he consistently has clean air to breathe. Continuing the rolling back of Ohio's renewable energy and energy efficiency standards will make impossible choices like this even more frequent for pediatricians, kids, and families.

Air pollution affects kids' health in many other ways, beyond asthma and other lung diseases. Ever-increasing evidence indicates that prenatal and early childhood exposure to air pollution affects brain development. I have heard air pollution being described, appropriately, as "the new lead" – meaning that kids' learning, attention, and behavior are all negatively impacted by air pollution, especially particulate air pollution which is emitted by coal-fired power plants. Childhood exposure to pollution from coal-fired power plants results in impaired cognitive functioning, reduced test scores, and reduced grade point averages among school children. Prenatal exposure can even affect the quality of kids' sleep – underscoring growing evidence that the developing brain is very vulnerable to the effects of air pollution. Kindergarten readiness is an important indicator of kids' well-being in our Ohio communities – and I care for kids in my practice who experience many risk factors for suboptimal school readiness. If we're serious about enhancing our kids' school readiness, we need to be serious about clean air.

Prenatal exposure to air pollution also increases risk for low birth weight and prematurity. Both of these are risk factors for infant mortality. As you know, infant mortality is a health crisis in Cleveland and other Ohio cities. A study published last year that examined ten years of birth records in California showed that closing eight coal and oil power plants in California resulted in a 20% decrease in preterm birth for mothers living within 10km of these plants. As one of my obstetrician colleagues observed, if we invented a technology that could decrease premature birth by 20%, we would be shouting it from the rooftops. **The evidence is clear: transitioning to clean energy is an important public health intervention to improve birth outcomes. In other words, if we're serious about reducing infant mortality, we need to be serious about clean air.**

Recent research at the MIT Joint Program on the Science and Policy of Global change evaluated the health effects and economy-wide costs of Ohio's Renewable Portfolio Standards, and found that by 2030 the impact to Ohio's economy in avoided annual premature deaths would translate to an economic benefit of \$470 million per year, or 3 cents for every kWh of renewable energy generation supported by the RPS – far exceeding the cost of the RPS, with these health benefits yielding net \$170 million per year. If the health benefits of the energy efficiency standards are added to these estimates, these standards will result in preventing over 44,000 asthma attacks, 2,400 asthma-related emergency room visits, 4,400 heart attacks, and over 2,800 premature deaths by 2030.

Finally, continuing the repeal of Ohio's Renewable Portfolio Standard and Energy Efficiency Resource Standard, and subsidizing coal-fired power plants, would expose more children not just to increased harmful particulate air pollution, but also to toxic heavy metals like mercury, and to other dangerous pollutants. Ohio can't afford the current repeal of our standards—the health of our children is at risk.

Pediatricians have a responsibility to alert parents, our community, and policymakers about threats to our children's health. Babies and young children cannot advocate for themselves, so we as child health advocates must speak for them. In addition, there is no greater duty of the government than to protect our most vulnerable citizens. Because of this, I would like to conclude by stating that measures that reduce air pollution and support our transition to clean and renewable energy - like our RPS and EERS, and avoidance of coal plant subsidies - are measures to protect Ohio's most valuable resource: our children.

I urge this committee to reject HB 798, and instead fully repeal HB 6 by supporting House Bill 738, House Bill 746 and Senate Bill 346.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony.