



**SIERRA
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CHAPTER

Massachusetts Sierra Club
10 Milk Street, Suite 632
Boston MA 02103-4621
www.sierraclubmass.org
office@sierraclubmass.org
(617) 423-5775

March 11, 2014

Chairman John D. Keenan
Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy
State House, Room 473B
Boston, MA 02133

Chairman Benjamin B. Downing
Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy
State House, Room 413F
Boston, MA 02133

**Re: Testimony of the Massachusetts Sierra Club in Support of H.2935:
An Act to Transition to a Clean Energy Commonwealth**

Dear Chairman Keenan, Chairman Downing, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer our comments on *H.2935, An Act to Transition to a Clean Energy Commonwealth*, sponsored by Representative Ehrlich, which provides a framework for cleaner energy in Massachusetts through a gradual and responsible phase-out of coal-fired electric generation in our Commonwealth and responsibly provides a means to protect local economies and workers. The Sierra Club strongly supports this legislation not only because it recognizes the benefits of a clean energy future for Massachusetts and the need to provide for workers and the communities most affected, but also because of the health and environmental benefits that it promises through cleaner air and cleaner water.

Despite significant strides in the Commonwealth on renewable energy and efficiency, Massachusetts still receives a significant portion of our energy from coal, and frequently more than any other New England state. *H.2935, An Act to Transition to a Clean Energy Commonwealth* enables our communities and workers to move beyond coal while establishing responsible mechanisms for phasing out what is indisputably recognized as the toxic and harmful coal combustion to produce electricity in Massachusetts.

While the three remaining Massachusetts coal plants in MA have announced their retirement or de-listing by 2017 until that time, these facilities will continue to cause economic, environmental and public health damage to individuals, families and communities across the entire Commonwealth. Fortunately, this timeframe also creates an opportunity to act. *An Act to Transition to a Clean Energy Commonwealth* provides a comprehensive plan to protect the fiscal and physical health of coal-plant and other neighboring communities across Massachusetts.

Public Support

Public support for moving the Commonwealth beyond coal is overwhelming. Nearly 150 residents from across Massachusetts attended the November Committee hearing on H.2935

and delivered 4 hours of supporting testimony. The Salem Harbor Power Station Plant Revitalization Task Force – Coal-Fired Power Plant Decommissioning Subcommittee received over 800 comments that helped inform their final report.

H.2935 recognizes and plans for the fact that the retirement of coal plants often leave the local community and workers out in the cold. The host community often suffers significant lost revenue, and workers are commonly given little or no notice of plant retirement, and the former employer does not assist in their transition to other jobs. H.2935 places the responsibility of protecting communities and workers squarely where it should, at the doorstep of those who reaped long-term benefits and profit profits while burdening our residents with the public health and social impacts and costs.

Support for Communities and Workers

Last year, the Salem Harbor Power Station Plant Revitalization Task Force was created to review energy issues related to coal-fired electricity under Chapter 209 of the Acts of 2012. The Task Force looked at decommissioning for all three plants in the state. The Decommissioning Subcommittee's final report acknowledged the need to assist in developing decommissioning and transition plans, protecting local economies, and assisting displaced workers. H.2935 addresses those concerns.

Public Health Impacts

The continuation of operating until retirement the coal plants that will shutter in 2017 will adversely affect the health of more people than those plants employ. Today it is undeniable that extracting, transporting and burning coal makes communities and people sick. The National Academy of Sciences documents the health damages caused from just one coal-fired power plant as averaging \$156 million annually. The health impacts range from asthma attacks, heart attacks, emergency room visits, learning disabilities and brain damage, premature death and lost workdays. Even coal plants with pollution controls continue to cause serious health effects. The Clean Air Task Force published a 2010 report showing that pollution from coal-fired power plants causes 251 deaths, 211 hospital admissions, and 471 heart attacks in Massachusetts every year.

Coal plants are a primary source of airborne mercury and studies show that no level of mercury is safe. Airborne mercury pollution in Massachusetts is so significant that nearly all residents show some level of mercury in their systems, and at least 1 in 12 women of childbearing age have elevated levels. The MA Department of Public Health has issued a statewide advisory cautioning women of childbearing age, pregnant women and young children to not any eat freshwater fish caught within our borders due to mercury contamination. Nationwide, coal plants are the largest source of unregulated mercury emissions in the United States, pumping out 48 tons of the toxin every year. For facilities like Brayton and Mt. Tom, it is important to remember that these health impacts will continue each year that a plant continues to operate despite pending retirement or delist plans/requests.

Continuing Coal Operations Send Energy Dollars and Jobs out of the Commonwealth

Massachusetts necessarily imports all its coal. In 2008, the state ranked third -- behind Alabama and Florida -- on foreign coal imports, over \$206 million.¹ In 2011, 59% of coal imported to Massachusetts came from the Appalachian region while 41% came from Colombia, South America..² Appalachian coal is mined in the most biodiverse region of the country and frequently obtained via a mining practice called Mountaintop Removal (MTR) whereby explosives are used to blow the tops of mountains to facilitate ready access to coal deposits. To date MTR has devastated large areas of the Appalachian region. Colombian coal on the other hand, particularly coal sourced from the Cerrejón Zona Norte Mine in

Colombia, has been linked to widespread human rights violations against indigenous people as well as massive environmental devastation.³

Coal-Fired Power is one of the single largest contributors to climate change pollution in Massachusetts

In 2008, Massachusetts passed the *Global Warming Solutions Act* that requires the Commonwealth to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions 25% by 2020. In 2009, coal-fired power plants emitted 8.7 million tons of CO₂, almost 50% of the total emissions⁴ from the electric sector in Massachusetts despite providing only 23% of the electricity.⁵ Brayton Point, in Somerset, Massachusetts remains the first and at times the second largest single stationary source of carbon dioxide pollution in all of New England.⁶ That legislative action shows that Massachusetts has been a leader in fighting climate change, in part because it stands to suffer devastating consequences from rising sea levels and rising temperatures.

Recommendations

The energy landscape has changed significantly since H.2935 was initially filed. The three remaining coal plants in MA have announced retirement or signaled retirement with delisting from energy markets. Communities like Somerset MA, have seen substantially reduced tax revenue from reduced operations, and the Mt Tom coal plant has laid off at least half of its workforce. The writing is on the wall for moving beyond coal in MA, which amplifies the urgent need at this time for the legislature to identify mechanisms to protect communities and workers. H.2935 achieves these goals, and we ask that you report it favorably from committee.

Sincerely,



James Bryan McCaffrey
Senior Campaign Representative
Beyond Coal, New England

¹ Union of Concerned Scientists, [Burning Coal Burning Cash](#) (Aug. 2010)

² Energy Information Administration (EIA) Schedule 923 data

³ Greenpeace, [True Cost of Coal](#), November 2009

⁴ Energy Information Administration, [State CO₂ Emissions, October 2011](#)

⁵ EIA, State Electricity Profiles, Table 5, [Electric Power Industry Generation by Primary Energy Source 1990-2010](#)

⁶ EIA, State Electricity Profiles, Table 5, [Electric Power Industry Generation by Primary Energy Source 1990-2010](#)