September 29, 2025

The Honorable Marjorie C. Decker
House Chair, Joint Committee on Public Health
State House Room 130

The Honorable William J. Driscoll, Jr.
Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Public Health
State House Room 507

Support for S.1548/H.2369, *An Act to ensure cleaner air for communities overburdened by outdoor air pollution*

Chairs Driscoll and Decker, Vice Chairs Cyr and Kerans, and Members of the Joint Committee on Public Health:

The Massachusetts Environmental Justice Table, a coalition of organizations working to achieve environmental justice (EJ) that has been working to improve air quality in the Commonwealth, along with allies is pleased to announce its enthusiastic support for S.1548 and H.2369, *An Act to ensure cleaner air for communities overburdened by outdoor air pollution*, filed by Rep. Barber, Rep. Connolly, and Sen. Jehlen. This bill is a bold, yet necessary step to advance environmental justice and public health equity. We urge you to report S.1548/H.2369 favorably out of committee.

For over a decade, the Commonwealth has made important strides in addressing climate change and, relatedly, air pollution. The 2008 Global Warming Solutions Act and 2021 Roadmap to Net Zero law have helped the Commonwealth fight the climate crisis and improve air quality by reducing carbon emissions and related pollutants. These steps have accomplished tangible benefits, but these victories will not be complete until the benefits from cleaner air are reflected in public health outcomes and are shared among all of our communities. According to the American Lung Association's 2025 "State of the Air" report, the air quality in Massachusetts worsened for all pollution measures compared to last year. The Boston metro area ranked the second worst in the Northeast, most notably not a single "A" grade was earned by any Massachusetts county for ozone or particle pollution.[1]

Dangerous air pollution, especially from ultrafine particulate matter (UFP), nitrogen oxides, and black carbon, persists today in many parts of the Commonwealth. Unlike fine particulate matter, which spreads out over large geographical areas, ultrafine particulate matter, or tiny particles invisible to the human eye, stays in the immediate vicinity of polluting sources and is the most closely correlated particle with health harms.

And, while air pollution affects all, marginalized groups including people of color, Indigenous people, low-income households, and limited-English-proficient speakers continue to bear a disproportionate burden. The Community Assessment of Freeway Exposure and Health (CAFEH) confirmed that UFP presents a public health threat, leading to heart disease, stroke, diabetes, lung cancer, autism, and asthma, for people living, working, and going to school within

[1] American Lung Association, *State of the Air: Report Card, Massachusetts* (2025), Massachusetts | State of the Air | American Lung Association.

500 feet of congested roadways.[2] As the earth warms, asthma and respiratory diseases will increase dramatically in areas ravaged by air pollution.[3] Already, one in five pediatric asthma cases in the U.S. is attributable to transportation.[4] Those children are disproportionately of color and tend to live closer to highways.[5]

In Massachusetts, the burden of pediatric asthma is disproportionately high. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) reports that 9.7% of children in Massachusetts have current asthma, compared to the national average of 6.5%.[6] In Boston, the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) found that 15.9% of students in Boston Public Schools (grades K–8) had asthma in 2012[7], and 30.1% of high school students reported having asthma in 2023.[8] Between 2008 and 2012, children in Boston experienced over 12,000 asthma-related emergency department (ED) visits and hospitalizations, incurring more than $38.7 million in health care charges.[9]

While these public health issues are on the rise, the Commonwealth's existing policies are not keeping pace. Our Commonwealth's air quality monitoring infrastructure is out of step with technological progress and public health awareness. While the air monitoring network includes 21 air monitors measuring fine particulate matter and 9 monitors for black carbon, 13 those monitors are not necessarily located near roadways, ports, or airports to identify pollution hotspots. We need an expanded air monitoring network throughout the Commonwealth to measure ultrafine particulate matter and black carbon in locations near roadways. Once those monitors are in place, we can establish a baseline of air monitoring information. The Commonwealth has a bold target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent below 1990 levels by 2030. We need a similar plan in place to ensure reductions of traffic-related air pollution.

The legislation goes a long way in addressing these gaps. The bill would expand air monitoring for black carbon, UFP, and criteria pollutants in hotspots. This monitoring would provide critical information that will enable the Commonwealth to set reasonable and necessary air quality targets to be reached by the end of this decade. The bill will also require the installation of air filters in critical existing indoor spaces, such as schools, residential buildings with more than two tenant-occupied units, commercial buildings with more than five full-time employees, and correctional facilities within 200 meters of congested roadways. For eligible new buildings, such as day care facilities, residential developments, hospitals, schools, long-term care facilities,

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[2] Doug Brugge and Sharon Ron, *Particulate Policy: An Argument for a Regulatory Approach to Transportation-Related Ultrafine Particle Exposure*, 4–5 (June 21, 2021), https://www.mapc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Particulate-Policy-062121.pdf.
[3] *See* H. Orru et al., *The Interplay of Climate Change and Air Pollution on Health*, 4 Current Envtl. Health Report 504, 504 (2017).
[4] Lisa Mullins, *Climate Change Worsens Effects Of Global Outbreaks Like Coronavirus, Expert Says*, WBUR, Apr. 22, 2020, https://www.wbur.org/earthwhile/2020/04/22/climate-change-coronavirus.
[5] American Lung Association, Living Near Highways and Air Pollution, (Jan. 5, 2021), https://www.lung.org/clean-air/outdoors/who-is-at-risk/highways.
[6] Massachusetts Department of Public Health. (2023). *Massachusetts Environmental Public Health Tracking: Childhood Asthma*. https://matracking.ehs.state.ma.us
[7] Boston Public Health Commission. (2013). *Asthma in Boston: 2013 report*. https://www.bphc.org
[8] Boston Public Health Commission. (2023). *Boston Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) 2021.*
[9] Boston Public Health Commission. (2013). *Asthma in Boston: 2013 report*. https://www.bphc.org

school aged childcare programs, temporary shelters, nursing homes, the bill will require advanced filtration systems (e.g., MERV 16). MERV 16 air filters remove at least 95 percent of particles that are one micrometer or larger, yielding significant health benefits.[10]

S.1548/H.2369 addresses air quality in a comprehensive way, for both outdoor spaces and critical indoor facilities. The bill will have a tremendous benefit to our public health. It will not only improve quality of life, but also save lives. For those reasons, we support this legislation enthusiastically and recommend that you report it out of committee favorably. You may contact tristan@ace-ej.org, dmelly@environmentalleague.org, or pmuratore@clf.org with questions.

Sincerely,

Massachusetts Environmental Justice Table Co-Convening Groups:

Alternatives for Community and Environment
Arise for Social Justice
Coalition for Social Justice
GreenRoots
Groundwork Lawrence
North American Indian Center of Boston

And the following allies:

Boston Children's Hospital
Clean Water Action
Conservation Law Foundation
Environmental League of Massachusetts
Health Care Without Harm
Massachusetts Public Health Alliance
Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Mothers Out Front Massachusetts
Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts
Sierra Club of Massachusetts
Unitarian Universalist Mass Action Network
Climate Action Now Western Mass
Green Energy Consumers Alliance
Springfield Climate Justice Coalition
Union of Concerned Scientists

[10] Environmental Law Institute, *Reducing Indoor Exposure to Particle Pollution from Outdoor Sources: Policies and Programs for Improving Air Quality in Homes,* 13 (January 2020), web-reducing-indoor-exposure-particle-pollution-outdoor-sources.pdf (eli.org).