

January XX, 2020

RE: Call for Climate Action from Leading Virginia Institutions

Dear Members of the Virginia General Assembly,

As a group of businesses, municipalities, higher education institutions, hospitals, cultural institutions, and faith groups across the Commonwealth, we urge lawmakers to lead on climate change by supporting policies to accelerate Virginia's transition to a low-carbon, clean energy economy.

Climate change poses a significant risk to the health, livelihood, and economic stability of our communities. Recognizing these risks, our institutions are making ambitious commitments and taking action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adopt clean energy. Clean energy and clean transportation technologies provide an important economic opportunity for the Commonwealth—attracting new local investments, creating jobs, and enabling consumers to save money. However, we need policies that prioritize the decarbonization of our economy in order to fully address the risks or realize the value of tackling the climate crisis.

Specifically, we ask you to support:

- **The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI)**
- **Clean energy standards**
- **Greater customer access to clean energy**
- **Policies and programs that reduce transportation-related emissions**

An important step to ensure carbon emissions reductions in Virginia's electricity sector is for the Commonwealth to join the **Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI)** through legislative decree. As a regional, market-based program, RGGI incentivizes the lowest-cost means of reducing carbon pollution from power plants and has proven to be highly effective. The nine states that have participated in RGGI over the past ten years have successfully reduced electric-sector carbon emissions while growing their economies faster than other states and have saved ratepayers money through lower electricity prices.¹

Legislative authorization to join RGGI would enable Virginia to receive and invest RGGI proceeds, which are estimated at \$75 million annually for the Commonwealth². Use of these revenues should be prioritized toward clean energy investments and energy efficiency programs that relieve the energy burden in low-income communities.

¹ RGGI states reduced carbon emissions from power plants by 47% between 2009-2019, while during the same period electricity prices fell 5.7% and GDP growth has outpaced the rest of the country by 31%. Source: Acadia Center, "The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative: Ten Years in Review," September 17, 2019.

<https://acadiacenter.org/document/the-regional-greenhouse-gas-initiative-ten-years-in-review/>

² Energy News Network

<https://energynews.us/2018/12/17/southeast/rggi-works-virginia-advocate-on-what-state-stands-to-gain-from-carbon-cap/>

In addition to RGGI, lawmakers should pass policies that incentivize a swift transition to energy efficiency and renewable energy sources such as wind and solar.³ Standards that require increases in renewable energy deployment and incentivize utility investments in energy efficiency, also known as **clean energy standards**, are a key component for transitioning Virginia to a 100% carbon-free electricity system by 2050. Clean energy standards are proving successful in many states around the country as a cost-effective means of guiding utility decision-making in favor of lower-carbon, efficient, and renewable electricity. While RGGI clearly defines and guarantees carbon emissions reductions, clean energy standards help ensure that the right investments are being made locally to build a thriving, self-supporting, clean energy economy in Virginia. Virginia households, businesses, and institutions can also play an important role in scaling up clean energy resources; policies that remove barriers and provide **greater customer access to clean energy** are similarly critical for success.

Furthermore, we cannot ignore that transportation has now surpassed the electric power sector as the largest source of the Commonwealth's carbon emissions. We encourage lawmakers to explore and adopt **policies and programs that reduce transportation-related carbon emissions**—such as standards to incentivize low- and zero-emission vehicles, investments in electric vehicle charging stations, public transit systems, and more. We also encourage the Commonwealth to continue to explore regional opportunities to address transportation-related carbon emissions.

As leaders with operations, employees, investments and/or constituents in Virginia, we want to ensure that Virginians can enjoy a thriving economy, a clean environment, and healthy communities for the many generations to come. We look forward to working with lawmakers to tackle the climate crisis and make this vision a reality.

Sincerely,

[Names of institutions]

³ We do not view energy derived from woody biomass as renewable or sustainable.