



September 11, 2024

Chair Marjorie C. Decker  
Chair William Driscoll, Jr.  
Joint Committee on Public Health  
ATTN: Ramlia Hagi  
24 Beacon St., Room 130  
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Support for [H.2369/S.1548](#)

Dear Chair Decker, Chair Driscoll, and members of this Committee:

I am writing on behalf of Partners for a Healthier Community d/b/a Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts, a Springfield-based nonprofit that conducts research and evaluation, community health needs assessments, and convenes local coalitions, including the Pioneer Valley Air Coalition and the [Healthy Air Network](#). Our mission is to improve health outcomes in the rural, suburban, and urban communities of Western Massachusetts by advancing health equity and racial justice.

The Healthy Air Network was created from our Pioneer Valley Asthma Coalition and is made up of community organizations, healthcare institutions, municipalities and community residents working to improve air quality [improve air quality](#), increase [climate resilience](#) and improve health in Massachusetts. We install and maintain outdoor air sensors to provide real time air quality information at the very local level. We partner with Yale School of Public Health to analyze the data, identify the sources of the air pollution, and advocate for changes to improve air quality. We believe everyone has the right to healthy air.

I am writing to urge this Committee to support and advance H.2369/S.1548 because our Department of Environmental Protection needs to identify air pollution hotspots and set reduction targets for these hotspots.

We have been working for over a decade to reduce asthma by improving air quality in Western Mass. Air pollution is a major health danger for children and adults. Air pollution leads to morbidity for several chronic diseases including asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. In addition, air pollution affects the development of lungs and is linked to low birth weight and pre-term birth and susceptibility to infections. According to the American Lung Association, air pollution is linked to neurological effects in adults including reduced brain volume, cognitive decrements and dementia.<sup>i</sup> Asthma and Allergy Foundation reports in the cost of asthma – health care, school and work absences ) was almost \$82 billion <sup>ii</sup>For communities like Holyoke and Springfield with high rates of asthma, air pollution leads to tremendous social and economic cost for children, families and the community as a whole.

Dr Krystal Pollitt and her team at Yale School of Public Health analyzed data of fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) measured by Healthy Air Network sensors in Western MA to understand the



sources of air pollution and have shared this analysis at on the [Healthy Air Network website](#). They have found that traffic is an ongoing issue while wildfire and wood burning stoves impact air quality seasonally. In relation to traffic, the Sensors in downtown Springfield and Greenfield most often had the highest levels of PM<sub>2.5</sub> whereas sensors in Westfield, East Longmeadow and other smaller communities most often had the lowest levels. Common patterns in exposure levels by time of day suggest the importance of vehicle emissions in this exposure. During the fall and winter, concentrations rise during morning rush hour from about 6 to 10 AM. Levels then drop in the middle of the day, go up again around the afternoon rush hour, and stay high overnight." In terms of seasonality, the poor air quality during these times of the year are mostly because of PM<sub>2.5</sub> released from wildfires in the summer and homes using wood furnaces in the winter. <sup>iii</sup> While air quality is generally good, it is critical that the commonwealth fund efforts to track air quality hot spots and this bill would create a commission to do just that.

Boston College Global Observatory on Pollution and Health and colleagues estimates the effects of airborne fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) pollution on disease, death and children's cognitive function (IQ Loss) in every city and town in Massachusetts.

They found that in Massachusetts, among adults, PM<sub>2.5</sub> pollution was responsible for an estimated 2,780 (Confidence Interval [CI] 2726 – 2853) deaths: 1677 from cardiovascular disease, 2185 from lung cancer, 200 from stroke, and 343 from chronic respiratory disease. In children, PM<sub>2.5</sub> pollution was responsible for 308 low-weight births, 15,386 asthma cases, and a provisionally estimated loss of nearly 2 million Performance IQ points; IQ loss impairs children's school performance, reduces graduation rates and decreases lifetime earnings. <sup>iv</sup>

Holyoke and Springfield are among the communities most heavily burdened by asthma in our state, residents of those two cities are 3 and 4 times as likely to end up in the emergency room for asthma. Having asthma and other chronic conditions makes individuals more likely to suffer negative health impacts from poor air quality.

In a community event lead by PHIWM to gather feedback from residents of Springfield and surrounding areas in 2025, participants shared their experiences with poor air quality. Participants reported personal accounts and accounts of friends and family experiencing diverse health problems, such as asthma and other breathing issues.

*"Poor air quality has caused family members to have asthma attacks. It causes me to cough so hard I have cried."*

The bill is critical because it aims to improve air quality in communities that experience high levels of outdoor air pollution, particularly those identified as environmental justice populations. It proposes the establishment of a technical advisory committee to assess air pollution hotspots and recommend air monitoring and filtration systems for various types of buildings near major pollution sources. The committee would also identify funding sources to support the installation of air filtration systems and set targets for reducing air pollution levels over time. Additionally, the bill emphasizes public access to air quality data and community



involvement in monitoring efforts, which our project shows is very important to community residents.

It is crucial that the Legislature act now to enact policies that help everyone breathe easier. [H.2369/S.1548](#) will put us on a path to improving air quality in communities most impacted by pollution in Massachusetts. Please support and favorably report this bill out of committee.

If you have questions or would like to discuss our request, please contact me (jcollins@publichealthwm.org, 413-794-7739), our Senior Director of Strategy & Development Sarita Hudson, ([shudson@publichealthwm.org](mailto:shudson@publichealthwm.org), 413-794-7600) or our Policy Director Andrea Freeman (afreeman@publichealthwm.org, 978-895-0960)

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica Collins  
Executive Director

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<sup>i</sup> American Lung Association, <https://www.lung.org/clean-air/outdoors/what-makes-air-unhealthy/particle-pollution#health-effects>

<sup>ii</sup> Allergy & Asthma Foundation of America <https://aafa.org/advocacy/key-issues/access-to-health-care/cost-of-asthma-on-society/>)

<sup>iii</sup> <https://healthyairnetwork.org/measuring-air-quality/#SensorDataAnalysis>.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/centers/schiller-institute/sites/masscleanair.html#.Ytl9z8zJ770.link>.