



February 25, 2025
Senate Bill 882
Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
Support

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan and Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in support of the Coal Dust Cleanup and Asthma Remediation Act, Senate Bill 882 and House Bill 1088. The American Lung Association is the oldest voluntary public health organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease, through research, education and advocacy.

The American Lung Association in Maryland supports investments to help protect public health from the impacts of fossil fuel use for energy production. Imposing a fee on the transport of coal through the state would allow for the proceeds to be used to fund programs that align closely with the Lung Association's policy goals of moving to a zero-emission future across buildings and transportation and support investments in asthma programs and treatment for those communities most impacted by coal dust.

The health problems of extracting, transporting and burning coal for electricity are serious. The American Lung Association supports the immediate phase-out of conventional coal-fired power plants as the nation transitions to a clean energy future. The Lung Association believes that the U.S. should not continue to expand its coal-fired generating capacity because of the extensive scope of health risks associated with the use of coal and the disproportionate impact on local communities.

A [2024 study](#) from researchers at the University of California Davis found that transporting coal by rail comes with serious health risks for people who live nearby. Trains continuously generate fine particles, which can penetrate deep to the lungs and even the bloodstream, causing asthma attacks, heart problems and even premature death. The study also found that this pollution especially affects communities of color, low-income communities and children and seniors. The same is likely true here in Maryland, where those nearest the rail lines bear a health burden from the transport of coal.

Marylanders also have an additional burden of air pollution from the unhealthy ozone levels our state experiences, which adds to the lung health burden of coal transport. The American Lung Association's [2024 "State of the Air"](#) report found that two counties received a failing grade for high ozone pollution, with another four counties receiving a 'C' or lower.

Ozone ("smog") and particle ("soot") pollutants can intensify symptoms of existing lung disease, such as asthma attacks and emergency room visit in the short term. Long term exposure to air pollution can interfere with lung development for babies and children and can contribute to the development of new diseases (asthma, cancer, chronic inflammatory lung disease and diabetes)



and can lead to cognitive impairments later in life. Children and the elderly are more susceptible to these health impacts. Currently in Maryland, 80,837 adults and 504,338 children are currently living with asthma, and another 242,664 are managing other lung illnesses, increasing their risk from the aforementioned impacts of air pollution. The inclusion of funding to support asthma programs including outreach and treatment for those communities most impacted by coal dust is a critical piece of this bill. According to the Maryland Department of [Health](#), in 2020 the health care costs for asthma-related emergency departments totaled \$34 million and asthma-related hospitalizations cost an additional \$15.5 million totaling \$49.5 million.

Additionally, reducing greenhouse gas emissions causing climate change is similarly imperative to lung health. This is because climate change is making the job of cleaning our air much more difficult, as temperatures rise and drive conditions for unhealthy ozone pollution days and wildfire smoke, among other health challenges.

We're glad to see that nearly a quarter of proceeds would go to activities and programs related to increasing home energy efficiency and electrification, and another quarter reducing greenhouse gas emissions in buildings. The buildings sector is a source of both the greenhouse gases that drive climate change and emissions that harm human health directly. Americans spend about 90% of our time indoors, making good indoor air quality critical to the health of families. Cleaning products, mold and moisture, pests and even the appliances that we use, such as our water heater, furnace and stove, can all impact our air quality.

Appliances that burn natural gas, propane, heating oil or wood can release hazardous pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide, benzene and carbon monoxide into our homes. Using these appliances may increase the risk of breathing problems, asthma attacks, respiratory infections and other health harms – especially for children and the elderly. Programs to help people transition to newer, efficient electric appliances will improve indoor air quality and help our families breathe easier.

We also support the 22% that would go to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles, and another 20% investing in mass transit. In the United States, transportation and electricity generation are leading sources of unhealthy air and the pollutants that cause climate change. Those living near highways, ports, railyards, warehouses, and other transportation hubs are at greater health risk. The good news is, investing in clean transportation is a win-win, addressing both climate change and local pollution impacts at the same time. The Lung Association's "Zeroing in on Healthy Air" report found that shifting to zero-emission vehicles and electricity production would yield more than \$1.2 trillion in health benefits and 110,000 pollution-related deaths avoided over the coming decades nationwide, along with over \$1.7 trillion in global climate benefits. Maryland would see \$27.8 billion in cumulative public health benefits and avoid 2,530 premature deaths, 63,600 asthma attacks and 315,000 lost days.



Maryland can prioritize policies that meaningfully reduce criteria air pollutants, curb greenhouse gas emissions and ultimately protect the health and well-being of Marylanders in the long term.

I respectfully urge a favorable report for the Coal Dust Cleanup and Asthma Remediation Act for the benefits of reduction toxic air pollution and improving lung health, particularly for protecting our most vulnerable populations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aleks Casper". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Aleks Casper
Director of Advocacy
American Lung Association in Maryland