

Testimony for the Peoples Hearing on Climate Change at the Pennsylvania Climate Convergence on Oct. 2nd 2023

Hello,

My name is Liam Sacino and I came today from Philadelphia (Go Birds). I am just one of many thousands of people who are rising up across the country rising up and demanding action on the crisis, and as well as one of the thousands globally participating in the Extinction Rebellion.

Folks have come here today from across the state to speak at this public hearing of the people because we face a crisis that is economic, humanitarian, and existential in nature, and a threat to every person who occupies this building today. I'm here to make three points today, and offer two solutions to the issues at hand.

The first point is that the commonwealth is violating our constitutional rights by accelerating climate change.

This threat is pervasive, human-driven, and economically incentivized by both our federal gov't, state gov't, and many nations around the globe. An analysis by PennFuture found that in 2019 alone, the state gave more than 3.8 billion dollars in fossil fuel subsidies, while that same industry "imposed more than 11.1 billion dollars worth of external costs to the state and its residents". At a point when we need to be moving towards a just transition and environmental and energy justice, this government continues to allow the proliferation of dirty energy that one scholar has described as "invisible missiles pointed at future generations".

Climate crisis is disturbing in it's own right; with the air and water pollution this state faces, and the impact that's having our health at the community level, as well as record heat year after year that impacts our ability to be outside, and will continuously put a larger strain on food security. What's equally disturbing is that all of these phenomena are symptoms of policies and actions that violate the constitutionally held rights of Pennsylvanians to clean air, pure weather, and the preservation of our environment. This amendment has been in place since the early 1970s, an achievement shared with only one other state, Montana. I've personally heard this amendment invoked often by politicians in search of youth support or the votes of environmentalists, but rarely do we see it channeled as a means for challenging current social and economic order in the state.

In the State of Montana, which has shared this amendment for a similar period of time, there was recently a court case that some of you may have heard of, Held V. Montana. The landmark case found that the constitutional rights of young people were being violated through government policies that contribute to the acceleration of climate change. We ought to have rulings here that hold this position as well, as well as politicians who support this position in search of progress, rather than in the search of votes. We are in desperate need of politicians who will speak to the full scope and urgency of the climate crisis. Put simply, the Pennsylvania State Government and its leaders need to Tell the Truth and live that truth in their actions by

going after polluters with the full weight of the law on their side, and empowering communities with the same vigor and checkbook that they've subsidized dirty projects with for far too long. If we could find the money for climate destruction, surely we can find the money for climate justice.

The second point I'm here to make is that we can't stop climate destruction until we stop corruption.

Our constitutional rights are being violated without recourse because we live under unhealthy democracy. One of the large drivers that allows the unhealthy democracy to flourish here is a lack of a gift ban, a simple proposal that has been advocated for by groups like March on Harrisburg for far too long. This, in addition to poor campaign finance laws, allows for the selling of government policy to the highest bidder. This corruption is directly linked to the climate crisis. They take bribes, and the planet dies. And this corruption is a bipartisan issue. The gift ban is yet to see a vote in front of the full democratic controlled house or republican held senate. Just 2 weeks ago, it was announced that Pennsylvania will become an automatic voter registration state, an amazing accomplishment for the commonwealth. But when politicians are allowed to be bought and paid for, the people of this state's voices, and the power of their vote gets drowned out every day. Healing our planet, our communities, and our democracy are all intertwined and we need leaders to get in the game and go to work, or get out.

The third point I'm here to make is that we need to get to work on these issues now, because the cost of inaction is too high.

Business as usual means the continuation and worsening of poor health outcomes and excess mortality for frontline communities, unsustainable conditions for farmers and further consolidation of land ownership by corporations, and an increasingly hot and unlivable world for future generations. I can deeply appreciate Governor Shapiro's commitment to making sure that every kid in the state right now gets a breakfast on their tray, no questions asked. But if we continue our current trajectory, there won't be any food to put on the tray.

So what can be done? First, Leaders can tell the truth and take that truth to the legislative halls and courts.

Second, we can strengthen our democracy by passing the gift ban. If leaders are unwilling to pass a gift ban, they need to cede power to alternative democratic institutions like citizens assemblies on climate which actually do represent the people, unlike our current government.

We can strengthen the work ten times over towards a just transition, heal our democracy, and play a huge role in the aversion of further climate crises.

Our leaders simply need to find the guts to stand with workers and do so.

I'll conclude with one final observation: every time that the government rips up the social contract, a people's rebellion grows stronger.

Thank You