TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H.3333/S. 2197
AN ACT TO PREVENT BIOMASS ENERGY TO PROTECT THE AIR WE BREATHE
BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON TELECOMUNICATIONS, UTILITIES AND ENERGY
SEPTEMBER 13, 2021

The Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS) is a professional association of over 25,000 physicians, residents, and medical students across all clinical disciplines, organizations, and practice settings. The MMS is committed to advocating on behalf of patients for a better health care system, and on behalf of physicians, to help them to provide the best care possible. Over the past many years, through leadership of the Medical Society’s physician Committee on Environmental and Occupational Health, the Society has increased its policymaking and advocacy on issues at the critical intersection of environmental justice and public health. MMS has passed policy on environmental health issues including climate change, air pollution, water quality, and a broad list of energy policies, including biomass. The Medical Society has deep concerns regarding the environmental and health hazards posed by biomass plants and instead urges the promotion of public health, energy efficiency and conservation and near zero-pollutant emissions and other renewable energy technologies. As such, **MMS wishes to be recorded in support of House Bill 3333 and Senate Bill 2197, An act to prevent biomass energy to protect the air we breathe**, which will move to declassify biomass as renewable energy, remove it from Commonwealth’s Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards (RPS) program, thus rendering biomass plants ineligible for clean energy incentives.

The MMS recognizes the vital correlation of environmental justice and public health and the critical impact that environmental policy has on the health of the residents of the Commonwealth. Biomass power plants and heating systems are a significant source of fine particulate matter and other harmful air pollutants. Air pollution from wood burning biomass plants can cause a multitude of negative health outcomes for residents in the Commonwealth, including but not limited to asthma attacks, pneumonia, heart disease and cancer. These negative health effects result in emergency room visits, hospital stays and even premature death putting a burden on an already overwhelmed health care system. A new report from the American Lung Association finds more than 4 in 10 people (135 million) in the U.S. live with
polluted air, placing their health and lives at risk.\textsuperscript{1} Low-income populations and historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups are disproportionately exposed to and impacted by pollutants and experience greater adverse health impacts as a result. For example, Black and Hispanic individuals consistently have had significantly higher age-adjusted rates of hospitalization due to asthma than their White counterparts.\textsuperscript{2}

As Attorney General Healey noted to the committee this summer, “Biomass energy—and policies that subsidize it—exacerbate climate and environmental justice harms, both by immediately releasing greenhouse gas and other pollutant emissions from burning wood and by damaging or eliminating our forest and natural lands, which serve as critical carbon sinks as we seek to achieve the Commonwealth’s aggressive and necessary climate goals.” At present, proposed regulatory changes to RPS standards will significantly weaken Massachusetts’ stringent efficiency standards for biomass plants and fundamentally undermine Massachusetts’ climate, clean energy, and sustainable forestry goals. Instead, the legislature has the opportunity to avert the environmental and health harms that will result from these regulatory changes altogether and make further strides toward the Commonwealth’s climate goals by declassifying biomass as a renewable energy. For these reasons the Medical Society respectfully urges a favorable report on H.3333/S. 2197.

\textsuperscript{2} 2017 Massachusetts State Health Assessment, Chapter 3, available at https://www.mass.gov/doc/chapter-3-environmental-health/download.