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Testimony before the U.S. House Energy & Commerce Committee  
Subcommittee on Environment, Manufacturing, and Critical Materials

“Protecting American Manufacturing: Examining EPA’s Proposed PM2.5 Rule”

September 19, 2023

Good morning. Thank you, Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Tonko, and members of the Subcommittee for inviting me to be here today. My name is Almeta Cooper. I am the National Manager for Health Equity for Moms Clean Air Force which consists of more than 1.5 million moms, dads, and caregivers who are dedicated to protecting clean air and children’s health.

As an African American, a mother, and a member of Moms Clean Air Force, I am here today because nothing is more important than the health of our families and communities. Under the Clean Air Act, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is required to use the best available science to set air quality standards that are protective of human health. Moms Clean Air Force believes it is imperative that EPA follow the science and enact strong safeguards. It is a legal duty, and we believe that everyone has a right to breathe clean air.

Particle pollution is produced by, among other things, the burning of fossil fuels for energy - major sources include industrial smokestacks and vehicle exhaust. Because these particles are so tiny, they can be inhaled into our lungs and enter our bloodstream, where they can cause serious health effects, including heart disease, cancer, compromised immunity, asthma, and even adverse pregnancy and birth outcomes.

Particle pollution or PM2.5 is also a leading cause of premature death. In the US, [researchers estimate that PM2.5 is responsible for well over 100,000 deaths each year](#) - a staggering toll for families and communities around the country.

And the public health burden of PM2.5 is not distributed evenly. In the US, people of color, particularly Black and Latino communities, are [disproportionately exposed](#) to this dangerous pollutant. People of color are [more than six times](#) more likely to visit the emergency room for asthma-related issues. [Black children are more than seven times more likely to die from asthma](#) than white children. And Black Americans 65 years and older are [three times more likely to die from exposure to soot](#) than white Americans over 65. These inequities are patently unjust.

I ask the Committee members to remember that the statistics you hear today are tied to real people all over this country. Particle pollution hurts families everywhere.

Real people like Hazel Chandler have shared their real life experience with Moms Clean Air Force.

Hazel Chandler is a great-grandmother in Arizona who has lived in cities with failing grades for air pollution throughout her adult life. The cumulative impacts are threatening to cut her life short as she now experiences asthma, immune dysfunction, and stage 4 cancer.

And Luz Drada, a Latina mom who lives in Washington, D. C. and has a compromised immune system. When she was pregnant with her young son Luz developed a high-risk condition -preeclampsia, a form of dangerously high blood pressure. As a consequence, her son was born prematurely. Maternal exposure to PM 2.5 has been linked with a higher risk of preeclampsia.

And Shaina Oliver, an Indigenous mom in Colorado, who was born on a Navajo reservation surrounded by pollution sources like coal plants and oil and gas operations. Like other children on the reservation, she was born prematurely and low birth weight, and as an infant, she was diagnosed with asthma and struggled to breathe when the air quality was poor.

And Tracy Sabetta, a mom who lives in Pickerington, Ohio and grew up in the small town of Ashtabula, Ohio located in the northeast corner of the state, right on Lake Erie. Her father was a boiler operator in a large chemical factory that was located next to a coal-burning power plant. The air and water quality in Ashtabula while Tracy was growing up was dismal, and as a child she was almost as accustomed to seeing “no swimming” or fishing advisories as she was to the beautiful sunsets over the water. Her older brother had asthma, and she remembers him struggling with trying to work jobs outside in the summer. He eventually had to quit and work lower-paying jobs just to be able to breathe.

And Mercedes McKinley, a Latina mom who lives in Nevada, whose home is located close to a major highway. Her air filters have to be replaced monthly instead of every three months, because soot and other particles build up, and if she doesn't wipe it down, a black film forms on the grills of her air vents.

And Patrice Tomcik who lives in Pennsylvania, [a state with the highest rate of particle pollution deaths per capita](#). Her community is located near many polluting sources - an interstate connector, a steel plant, and now a Shell petrochemical plant. She worries about the dirty air her son, a pediatric cancer survivor, is breathing.

Hazel, Luz, Shaina, Tracy, Mercedes, and Patrice's stories represent the stories of millions of real people whose everyday lives are impacted by particle pollution: children with asthma who struggle to breathe when the air quality is poor, mothers whose pregnancies and babies are endangered by unhealthy air, and older adults whose families grieve when they die before their time.

In closing, I urge the members of the Subcommittee to remember the children, neighbors, friends, and families who are being harmed by unhealthy air. Also, I urge Members to remember that the law mandates that EPA set standards that are protective of public health. The mandate specifies public health, because safeguarding the health of our families and communities is of the utmost importance.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to testify and look forward to your questions.

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