



# MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY

*Every physician matters, each patient counts.*

October 7, 2021

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Chair, Joint Committee on Public Health  
State House, Room 33  
Boston, MA 02133

Senator Joanne M. Comerford  
Chair, Joint Committee on Public Health  
State House, Room 413-C  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairs Decker & Comerford:

The Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS), a professional association of over 25,000 physicians, residents, and medical students across all clinical disciplines, organizations, and practice settings, 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 the thoughtful 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 relating to climate change, air pollution, water quality, as well as a broad list of energy policies, including methane or "natural" gas. We write to you in your capacity as leaders in public health in the Commonwealth with subject matter jurisdiction over issues pertaining to environmental policy and public health.

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. While the Medical Society is generally engaged in matters at the intersection of environmental justice and public health, we are particularly concerned with issues surrounding the controversial natural gas compressor station in North Weymouth. There are serious public health concerns associated with methane gas. Although methane gas is sometimes referred to as "clean energy" and "natural," the carcinogens that are carried with gas extracted via unconventional means — otherwise known as hydraulically fractured gas — include known carcinogens, neurotoxins, and respiratory irritants, including benzene, formaldehyde, mercury, radionuclides, volatile organic compounds and particulate matter.<sup>1</sup> The increase in atmospheric methane — a 250% rise since the beginning of the pre-industrial era and an over 10% rise in the last 20 years<sup>13</sup> — correlates with unconventional oil and gas

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<sup>1</sup> Landrigan P, Frumkin H, Lundberg B. The false promise of natural gas. *NEJM*. 2020; 382:2;104–107.

extraction,<sup>2,3,4</sup> making these fossil fuels a major driver of climate change.<sup>5</sup> These known carcinogens and climate challenges pose significant risks to human health and in particular, to children's health, since children are more impacted by carcinogens<sup>6</sup> and by climate change than adults.<sup>7</sup>

The Medical Society has additional concerns regarding the Weymouth natural gas compressor station. Specifically, we know that environmental and health harms will fall disproportionately to historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups, as this station is sited in an area that includes two state-designated "environmental justice" communities, and that has a long history of air pollution and soil contamination. Per a 2019 report from the group Greater Boston Physicians for Social Responsibility, state data already demonstrate that residents have statistically higher rates of cancer, pediatric asthma, and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. In addition to these serious health concerns, which have been well-documented to date, the Medical Society joins others in voicing its concern regarding the adequacy of the statutorily required health impact assessment. We also have serious concerns about the health and safety of residents given the subsequent gas leaks that have occurred at the Weymouth compressor station and therefore implore your committee to explore a prospective study of health outcomes in the impacted populations.

Thank you for your consideration of these important public health issues. We'd be happy to meet and discuss further at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Carole E. Allen, MD, MBA, FAAP

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<sup>2</sup> Climate Change Indicators: Atmospheric concentrations of Greenhouse Gases <https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/climate-change-indicators-atmospheric-concentrations-greenhouse-gases>. January 23, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Worden J, Bloom A, Pandey S, et al. Reduced biomass burning emissions reconcile conflicting estimates of the post-2006 atmospheric methane budget. *Nature Communications*. 2017;8:2227.

<sup>4</sup> Howarth RW. Is shale gas a major driver of recent increase in global atmospheric methane? *Biogeosciences*. 2019;16:3033–46.

<sup>5</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Global warming of 1.5°C: an IPCC special report. Geneva: World Meteorological Organization, 2018. <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>.

<sup>6</sup> Wild P, Kleinjans J. Children and Increased Susceptibility to Environmental Carcinogens *Cancer Epidemiology*. 2003;12(12):1389–1394.

<sup>7</sup> Children and Climate. [https://www.apha.org/-/media/files/pdf/topics/climate/childrens\\_health](https://www.apha.org/-/media/files/pdf/topics/climate/childrens_health).