

3 March 2021

House Committee On Energy and Environment  
Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court Street NE  
Room 347  
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Marsh, Vice Chair Helm and Members of the Committee:

Multnomah County asks for your support of House Bill 2814, a major step forward in reducing the risk to people, especially people of color, from toxic diesel air emissions. The creation of indirect source rules would regulate air contaminants produced by aggregate mobile source emissions associated with the construction and operation of indirect sources like rail yards, construction sites, and freight handling facilities.

Exposure to diesel engine exhaust causes cancer, increases the risk of heart attack, stroke, and cardiovascular disease, exacerbates asthma and can lead to low-weight and preterm births.<sup>1</sup> Children are especially vulnerable because their lungs are still in the developmental phase and they breathe, on average, 50 percent more air per pound of body weight than adults. There is also a growing body of evidence linking traffic-related air pollution, including diesel exhaust, to neurodevelopmental disorders like Autism Spectrum Disorder.<sup>2</sup>

All Multnomah County residents are exposed to a dangerous level of diesel pollution. In some areas, however, like near transportation corridors, rail yards, and construction sites levels of diesel pollution are over 10 times health benchmarks.<sup>3</sup> In 2014 the Multnomah County Department of Health conducted a study of racial and ethnic health disparities and found that communities of color are exposed to levels of diesel pollution 2-3 times higher than their white counterparts.

Black/African Americans suffer the largest disparate exposure to diesel pollution. Black/African Americans are also twice as likely to be unemployed compared to non-Latino Whites, almost

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<sup>1</sup> U. S. Environmental Protection Agency. (2002). Health Assessment Document for Diesel Engine Exhaust. Washington, DC: National Center for Environmental Assessment, Office of Research and Development.

<sup>2</sup> Roberts, Andrea L., et al. "Perinatal air pollutant exposures and autism spectrum disorder in the children of nurses' health study II participants." *Environmental health perspectives* 121.8 (2013): 978-984.

<sup>3</sup> Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. *Portland Area Pollutant Summary Sheets/Maps for Air Toxics*. Portland 2012.

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four times as likely to have children living in poverty, and more than twice as likely to have children not meeting third-grade reading standards.<sup>4</sup> The disproportionate impact of diesel pollution on communities of color further exasperate, and are the result of, institutional racism. The same communities subject to the injustices of segregation, discrimination, urban renewal, and now displacement due to gentrification, have also born the brunt of the environmental impact from pollutants like diesel PM. The state has pledged to use environmental justice considerations in future strategies to reduce emissions from diesel, and we urge the state to fulfill that promise through the adoption of this bill.<sup>5</sup>

Workers are also at risk. Certain occupations expose people to higher levels of diesel exhaust, increasing their risk of negative health effects. These jobs include railroad workers, truck drivers, loading dock workers, diesel mechanics and those who work in and around construction equipment. In total, this accounts for over 29,000 members of the Oregon workforce.

Moreover, the entire Oregon population suffers because of exposure to diesel exhaust. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates diesel pollution causes 460 Oregonians to die prematurely every year. To make matters worse, there are an estimated 145 non-fatal heart attacks and 25,910 work loss days. The monetized value of health impacts in Oregon exceeds \$3 billion annually.<sup>6</sup>

The fact is, to reduce exposure to diesel pollution will take more regulation, and indirect source rules are among the most flexible and effective options available to the State. Mobile emissions are not addressed in the state's existing air toxics regulatory program, Cleaner Air Oregon, and medium and heavy-duty truck regulations from HB 2007 will not meaningfully affect the emissions from indirect sources. Indirect source rules limit aggregate air pollution from areas with concentrated emissions from mobile sources. This approach in other jurisdictions has effectively reduced pollution that harms health and and leads to environmental justice inequities. According to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, in the Portland Metro region over 70% of diesel emissions come from marine, rail, and other non-road sources<sup>7</sup>, so regulating the sources where these engines are found is imperative when trying to reduce unhealthy levels of pollution.

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<sup>4</sup> Multnomah County Health Department. 2014 Report Card on Racial and Ethnic Disparities. Portland 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. *Portland Air Toxics Report: Environmental Justice and Sensitive Populations*. Portland 2012

<sup>6</sup> State of Oregon. Department of Environmental Quality. *The Concerns about Diesel Engine Exhaust*. Operations Division. Portland. 2015

<sup>7</sup> Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. *Portland Area Pollutant Summary Sheets/Maps for Air Toxics*. Portland 2012.

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The good news is that the understanding of the health danger from diesel emissions is so well known that technology, now decades old, exists to dramatically reduce the threat. We do not need new inventions, we only need broader use of existing solutions and we need smart public policies, like those contained in HB 2814, to move the needle toward clean air. Because of federal regulations, newer engines are fitted with pollution controls that reduce toxic emissions by 99%. But because federal rules only apply to *new* engines, it is left to states to address the thousands of older and dirtier engines still in use. This bill will address these major sources of unregulated pollution in a targeted and geographically specific way.

Breathing is not a choice, and for most of us we cannot control the quality of the air we breathe. We rely on regulation to set standards so that everyone has the opportunity to breathe clean, healthy air. In the case of diesel emissions, you have a special opportunity to improve public health for everyone, but especially the health of children, communities of color and low-income communities that bear the greatest burden of diesel air pollution. This is the time to commit our state to a clean air future, the cost of inaction is too great a price to pay. Please support HB 2814.

Sincerely,



John Wasiutynski