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On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment

Measure: SB488

I support this bill. The first and last thing we all do is breathe. We should be able to take deep invigorating breaths of clean fresh air, not poison and particulate matter. Medical waste incineration is more toxic than municipal waste, due to a higher percentage of plastics, and because the plastics in medical waste contain more polyvinyl chlorides (PVCs). This leads to higher levels of toxic air emissions, particularly dioxin and lead.

Covanta Marion is currently regulated under emissions standards for municipal waste incinerators, with higher emissions limits, rather than the more stringent standards for large medical waste incinerators. Oregon law currently has a large loophole that allows the Covanta incinerator to exceed EPA guidelines for safe emissions levels for new, large medical waste incinerators.

We need to close this regulatory loophole to protect our air quality and public health. The Willamette Valley should not be the dumping ground for toxic medical waste from other states and countries. Other states export their waste to Oregon so that it is “out of sight and out of mind,” but there is no “away”! As a result, Oregonians have to breathe more toxic air.

An additional concern about this trash burner is that the communities that are most impacted by its dirty air emissions are environmental justice communities in the Northeast Salem and Woodburn areas. Communities of color have stood up to protest pollution from incineration as one of the movement’s original environmental justice issues. It is time Oregon moves beyond promises and takes real action to remedy these wrongs.