

To: House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans
Date: February 8, 2024
Re: HB 4083 Coal Act

Greetings Chair Grayber, Vice-Chairs Lewis and Tran, and Members of the Committee:

I am Dr. Theodora Tsongas. I am an environmental health scientist specializing in epidemiology. I am a member of the Healthy Climate Action Team of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility, as well as the Climate and Health Committee of the American Public Health Association. The majority of my career has been in public health at the State and Federal levels, including the Health Division of the Oregon Health Authority. I am a PERS member.

Because of my understanding of the science regarding the roll of fossil fuels in causing climate disruption and the adverse effects on health of both climate disruption and fossil fuel emissions, I have listened to my conscience and have tried, to the best of my ability, to remove fossil fuel investments from my savings. However, the Oregon Investment Council and the State Treasurer have made it impossible for me to handle my finances according to my conscience, values, and dedication to promoting public health. I must live on my pension that comes from profits of an industry that willfully exacerbates the public health crises that I have worked against for most of my life.

Burning fossil fuels not only leads to catastrophic climate disruption, but emissions of fine particulate matter from burning fossil fuels are responsible for some 10 million premature deaths per year, worldwide. You may be able to understand that having to live off these investments makes a mockery of my life's work. But beyond that concern and the need for cognitive dissonance imposed upon me, we have known for a while that coal is a bad investment, with a real risk of leaving us with costly stranded assets. So why has the State Treasurer and Investment Council not seen this and acted to correct this poor investment strategy based on substantial evidence? Are they not paying attention? I participated in a meeting with Treasurer Read a few years ago on behalf of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility, in which we protested investments in coal. We described what we know about the many adverse effects on life and health of coal extraction and use as a fuel. He expressed concern about his children's future, so apparently he had some understanding of the risks of continuing to extract and burn fossil fuels. So what happened? Apparently, not enough.

It is time to correct this mistake now, and manage our resources based on our knowledge of the consequences of our actions. Please pass House Bill 4083, the Coal Act. Thank you for your time and attention to my concerns.