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Testimony: **Raised Bill: 6551 AN ACT CONCERNING ENVIRONMENTAL AIR
QUALITY**

Good Morning: Dear Chairs Senator Cohen, Representative Gresko, Ranking Members Senator Miner, Representative Harding and distinguished members of the Environment Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of *Raised Bill 6551 An Act Concerning Environmental Air Quality*, on behalf of the Connecticut Nurses' Association (CNA).

As nurses, we are deeply concerned about the health impacts of poor air quality on Connecticut residents, particularly those living in environmental justice communities. For far too long, many people of color and low income have been racially segregated into communities surrounded by the cumulative sources of pollution including mobile sources from highways and busy streets, incinerators and other polluting factories and facilities in these communities.

Air pollution is a significant public health concern. It is widely accepted that air pollution is directly linked to exacerbation of asthma and other chronic respiratory diseases, cardiovascular disease including heart attacks and stroke, lung cancer and premature death.¹ A recent, alarming, Harvard study found that even short-term exposure to air pollution was linked to a significant rise in premature death. The elderly, African Americans, low-income residents and females were most affected.² Residents in

¹ See <https://www.epa.gov/air-research/air-research-health-effects-air-pollution/>

² See <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/press-releases/air-pollution-premature-death-u-s-seniors/>

environmental justice communities bear a disproportionate burden of health impacts from pollution and have health and economic disparities that put them further at risk. Studies of children in urban and environmental justice communities have shown links between poor air quality and neurobehavioral disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Pregnant mothers in these communities have been found to have higher incidence of low-birth weight babies and children with higher incidences of autism, perhaps linked to poor air quality. Neurological problems associated with poor air quality include impaired memory and Alzheimer-like brain declines in older adults.³ These serious health impacts lead to premature death, suffering and increased economic burden on families.

Every county in Connecticut received a grade of F for air quality in the 2020 State of the Air Report by the American Lung Association.⁴ Residents living in urban and environmental justice communities are disproportionately impacted even further by chronic and short-term air pollution. Poor air quality is not only a public health issue but impacts Connecticut's economy with more emergency room visits, more missed days from school and work and more residents that have long term impacts of unemployment from health impacts of chronic pollution. As nurses working in all settings taking care of these residents, we strongly support the focus on setting up an environmental equity working group to better address these systemic disparities and health impacts. We also support language giving authority to the Siting Council to reject new and expanded permits of polluting facilities when other less harmful options exist. These measures will have a positive impact on the most vulnerable residents in our state. We support passage of Raised Bill 6551.

Sincerely,

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Professor Emeritus, Central Connecticut State University

³ See <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/agents/air-pollution/index.cfm>

⁴ See <https://www.stateoftheair.org/city-rankings/states/Connecticut>