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AUSTIN PHYSICIANS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY®
U.S. AFFILIATE OF INTERNATIONAL PHYSICIANS FOR THE PREVENTION OF NUCLEAR WAR

December 20, 2010

Sunset Advisory Commission
PO Box 13066
Austin, TX 78711

Re: Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) Sunset Review

Dear Sunset Advisory Commission:

We are physicians, nurses and health professionals from across Texas, united in our desire to see the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) become an agency which protects the health of Texas citizens by preserving our state's natural resources – its air, water and soil.

The TCEQ makes decisions that have broad impacts on human health across Texas. A clear example is TCEQ's decision to allow coal-fired power plants to proliferate around the state. Coal-fired power plants have been linked to cardiovascular and respiratory disease and contribute to tens of thousands of deaths annually. By emitting carbon dioxide, coal burning also contributes to global warming, perhaps the gravest public health threat of our time. As our climate changes, increased storms, changes in food and water supplies, increases in sea level, increased mosquito-borne diseases, and many other negative health impacts will be felt widely. Reducing our dependence on coal would help mitigate these impacts.

The health of Texans would be greatly improved if the TCEQ lived up to its name and protected "environmental quality" rather than repeatedly giving the green light to industries that pollute. To strengthen this agency, we ask that the Sunset Review Commission make several changes to the agency's structure in the course of its sunset review process.

- Change air permitting and enforcement processes to strengthen protection of clean air;
- Create space for public participation in the permitting process;
- Strengthen the Office of Public Interest Council;
- Strengthen water quality measures; and
- Strengthen waste permitting.

These recommendations are further supported by the 2005 Consensus Statement on Methylmercury and Public Health and the 2009 Consensus Statement on Reducing the Health Burden of Air Pollution in Texas, which were adopted by the Texas Medical Association. If TCEQ cannot or will not bring their permitting into compliance with the federal Clean Air Act, permitting authority should be remanded to the EPA.

We know Texas can protect its great future if TCEQ could act to preserve the environment. Please see that the sunset review process reforms this crucial agency so that it protects the health of Texans for centuries to come.

Sincerely,

Physicians for Social Responsibility, Supporting Doctors, Nurses and Other Health Professionals

Doctors

Louis Appel, MD, MPH
Austin, TX

Alan Barker, DO
Bay City, TX

Sara Bartos, MD
Austin, TX

Terrell Benold, MD
Austin, TX

Nancy Binford, MD
Austin, TX

Joel Blumberg, MD
Austin, TX

Sarah Buttrey, MD
Austin, TX

Joe Cannon, MD
Bay City, TX

Kimberly Carter, MD, MPP
Austin, TX

Tillman M. Daniel, MD
Bay City, TX

Lisa Doggett, MD, MPH
Austin, TX

Kevin Dowling, MD
Bay City, TX

James Ely, MD
Bay City, TX

Vincent P. Fonseca, MD, MPH
San Antonio, TX

W. Barton Griffith, MD
Bay City, TX

George P. Hanna, MD, FACC
Bay City, TX

Hazel Heddings, MD
Houston, TX

Kevin Hopkins, MD, FACS
Corpus Christi, TX

Amy Keffer, MD
Bay City, TX

Greg Keffer, MD
Bay City, TX

Jacqueline Kerr, MD
Austin, TX

Margaret Kini, MD
Austin, TX

Karen Lewis, MD
Dallas, TX

Melba F. Lewis, MD
Austin, TX

Barry Liberoni, MD
Bay City, TX

Hodges Lee Martin, MD, MPH
Austin, TX

Bob Maxcey, MD
Bay City, TX

Patricia Maxwell, MD
Bay City, TX

Paul Mayer, MD
Livingston, TX

Melanie Mouzoon, MD
Houston, TX

Juan Nieto, MD
Austin, TX

Greg Pappas, MD
Bay City, TX

Hanoch Patt, MD
Austin, TX

P.P. Raju, MD
Bay City, TX

Jane Ripperger-Suhler, MD
Austin, TX

James C. Rorig, MD
Bay City, TX

Cheryl Sacco, MD
Bay City, TX

Elizabeth Sanchez, MD
Austin, TX

Mark Schnee, MD
Houston and Bay City, TX

Kay Sebastian, MD
Bay City, TX

Christina Sebestyen, MD
Austin, TX

Greg Sheff, MD
Austin, TX

Andrew Sher, MD
Bay City, TX

Melissa Smith, MD
Austin, TX

Dana Sprute, MD, MPH
Austin, TX

Wesley Stafford, MD
Corpus Christi, TX

Elliot Trester, MD
Austin, TX

Ammini Valloppillil, MD
Bay City, TX

Joseph Valloppillil, MD
Bay City, TX

Don Williams, MD
Austin, TX

Nurses

Jordan Abrams, RN
Austin, TX

Terri Bagwell, RN, FNP
Austin, TX

Mary Barnett, CNM, RN
Austin, TX

Catherine Barrett, RN
Austin, TX

Linda Chambers, MPH, RN
Austin, TX

Hsiu-Rong Cheng, MSN, RN
Austin, TX

Katherine Churchill, RN
Austin, TX

Cindy Edwards, RN
Austin, TX

Eileen R. Fowles, PhD, RNC-OB
Austin, TX

Jill R. Frank, RN, FNP-C
Austin, TX

Nicole Garinger, RN
Austin, TX

Richard Gill, RN
Victoria, TX

Tracie Harrison, PhD, RN
Austin, TX

Terin Holbrook, RN
Austin, TX

Sharon D. Horner, PhD, RN, FAAN
Austin, TX

Shalonda Horton, MSN, BSN, RN
Austin, TX

Christina Hwang, RN
Austin, TX

Julie Isaac, RN, FNP-C
Austin, TX

Terry Jones, PhD, RN
Austin, TX

Heather Keizman, RN, WHNP-BC
Austin, TX

Mildred Lockwood, RN
Austin, TX

Lauren Lovering, RN
Austin, TX

Eduardo Maraboto, RN
Austin, TX

Linda M. Miller, RN
Austin, TX

Marian Morris, MPH, RN
Austin, TX

Janet Morrison, MSN, RN
Austin, TX

Emily Muehr, RN
Austin, TX

Christina Murphey, PhD, RNC-OB
Austin, TX

Linda Murphy, MS HEd, RN
Austin, TX

Trish O'Day, MSN, RN, CNS
Austin, TX

Benjamin Pagano, RN
Austin, TX

R. Jeanne Ruiz, PhD, RNC
Austin, TX

Connie A. Ryan, WHNP
Austin, TX

Karen Sher, RN, CIC
Bay City, TX

Mary Ann Shimek, FNP
Bay City, TX

Betty Skaggs, PhD, RN
Austin, TX

Sheila Smith, MSN, RN, FNP-BC
Austin, TX

Carole Taxis, PhD, RN
Austin, TX

Ana Todd-Noonan, BSN, RN
Austin, TX

Brittany Uglesich, RN
Austin, TX

Other Health Professionals

Gwynn Cherie Littleton, CRT
Sargent, TX