

**Testimony of Juanita Constible, Senior Advocate for Climate and Health,
Natural Resources Defense Council**

**At the Maryland Office of the Attorney General and the Maryland General Assembly
Public Hearing on the Trump Administration’s Proposed Repeal of the Clean Power Plan**

Thursday, January 11, 2017

As Prepared for Delivery

Good afternoon. My name is Juanita Constible, and I work for the Natural Resources Defense Council as a Senior Advocate for Climate and Health. I am here with my colleagues Amanda Levin and Lyssa Lynch on behalf of NRDC’s more than 3 million members and online activists, to oppose the repeal of the Clean Power Plan.

I am also here for personal reasons, because I have seen firsthand how climate-related disasters can destroy people’s lives.

My advocacy career started in south Louisiana, two years after Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans. Some of the neighborhoods I worked in still had no street lights or street signs, and had potholes that felt big enough to swallow my Honda Civic. I heard one raw story after another of loss and heartbreak—but not all of those stories were from Katrina. You see, Louisiana isn’t just in the path of deadly hurricanes. The state is also experiencing one of the fastest rates of relative sea level rise in the world.¹ I regularly met locals who would point to a stretch of open water and say things like: “My daddy used to raise cattle there.” “My grandma used to be buried there.”

So, I felt physically ill late last summer when Hurricane Harvey, and then Hurricane Irma, and then Hurricane Maria rolled over the southeastern U.S. I expected the worst—which by some measures did not happen. But in Puerto Rico, where nearly half of the island is still without power, more than 2 million people may be exposed to unhealthy bacteria in their water, and countless residents can’t get to medical facilities for care, the tragedy is still unfolding.²

Here in Maryland, rising temperatures driven by carbon pollution are boosting the threat of serious asthma attacks, food- and water-borne infections like *Salmonella*, and heat-related illnesses and deaths.³ For example, the Baltimore metropolitan area experienced an annual average of 12 dangerously hot summer days from 1975 to 2010 and 29 deaths above the daily standardized summertime average—known as “excess” deaths.⁴ Without action to dramatically cut carbon pollution

from current levels, Baltimore could see 50 dangerous summer days each year by the 2040s, and 520 excess deaths on those days.

The good news is that we already know that cleaning up power plants protects our health. For instance, Maryland's participation in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative helped residents avoid up to 81 early adult deaths, more than 1,000 asthma attacks, and close to 5,000 missed work days from 2009 to 2014.⁵

Of course, Maryland and the other leadership states cannot solve the climate crisis on their own. All parts of the country must do their fair share. And if they do, all parts of the country will see the health benefits of cleaner air and a safer climate *and* the increased opportunities that come from a clean energy economy.

The Clean Power Plan is an essential part of a larger effort to protect our health from climate change. Instead of repealing limits on dangerous carbon pollution, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency should be working to strengthen them.

Thank you for holding this critical hearing, and for the opportunity to testify today.

END NOTES

¹ NOAA, "Tides & Currents: Sea Level Trends," tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/sltrends/sltrends.html (accessed January 7, 2018).

² Juanita Constible, "Congress Must Act to Protect the Health of Storm Survivors," NRDC, January 8, 2018, www.nrdc.org/experts/juanita-constible/congress-must-act-protect-health-storm-survivors.

³ Maryland Institute for Applied Environmental Health and Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, *Maryland Climate and Health Profile Report* (April 2016), mde.maryland.gov/programs/Marylander/Documents/MCCC/Publications/Reports/MarylandClimateandHealthProfileReport.pdf.

⁴ Juanita Constible, *Killer Summer Heat: Paris Agreement Compliance Could Avert Hundreds of Thousands of Needless Deaths in America's Cities* (Natural Resources Defense Council, June 2017), www.nrdc.org/resources/killer-summer-heat-paris-agreement-compliance-could-avert-hundreds-thousands-needless.

⁵ Michelle Manion et al., State Level Results, appendix E in *Analysis of the Public Health Impacts of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, 2009-2014* (Abt Associates, 2017), abtassociates.com/RGGI.