

Testimony of Robin Kristufek, RN
EPA Hearing on Proposed Revisions to the NAAQS for PM
July 19, 2012

My name is Robin Kristufek. I am a Public Health Nurse with the County of Sacramento and I do home visits through Nurse-Family Partnership, a program serving families living in poverty, often the homeless, who have children under 2 years old. I am also a member of Physicians for Social Responsibility.

First of all, I want to thank you for all that the EPA has done for this country. The Clean Air Act of 1970 has helped all of us breathe cleaner, healthier air and I want to express my gratitude for all you have done to uphold it.

I would like to demonstrate what I have experienced many times, in the course of my job working with very small children who live close to major thoroughfares or industrial plants, or are homeless, and/or who take the bus everywhere due to not being able to afford a car.

[Baby wheezing and gasping for breath, with nasal flaring and grunting.]

Why does this happen? Why do babies who live in poverty have higher rates of respiratory problems than the general population? Why would a two month old find it so difficult to breathe? Some people say "oh, it's just genetic. Some people just get asthma or bronchitis". While certainly there can be a genetic component, your own scientists, and many studies show that asthma and bronchitis, chronic respiratory problems are not solely genetic. Rigorous studies show that people who are exposed to high levels of particulate matter have higher rates of respiratory problems than the

average person. You already have that data so I'm not going to quote those numbers; many other speakers have done that already.

One reason is this: Parents who work at minimum wage jobs such as serving you your burgers, or cleaning your hotel room often cannot afford a car. They need to take the bus, and in cities like Sacramento, bus service is abysmal – bus lines are miles apart, and each line runs only once each hour or two. To get from point A to point B, you often need to walk a long distance to get to the bus line, then take 2 or 3 different buses, waiting half hour or more in between, sitting at a bus stop on a busy street, breathing in concentrated exhaust as cars, trucks, buses all spew out noxious blasts. Babies who are brought to day care in this manner breathe in the high levels of pollutants right along with everyone else. And of course, babies' lungs are not yet fully developed and they are therefore much more susceptible to lung problems than are adults.

Another factor is where poor people often live. Their main options (if they are lucky enough to afford rent at all) are apartments on busy streets, or right next to a freeway, or in an industrial area, perhaps close to a power plant or factory. Most poor people live where there are very little trees that could filter the emissions before air flows into the homes. And of course, many people who work for minimum wage can't even afford the "affordable" housing, and are homeless. Homeless people sleep close to streets or under freeways, children and all. In either case, homeless or in "affordable" low-income housing, adults and children living in poverty are often breathing much more highly concentrated levels of vehicle or industrial emissions with

high levels of PM than you or I do while at home.

Poor people experience the physical reality of living and traveling in the areas of our cities that are the most highly concentrated with particulate matter -and they don't have the means to protect themselves from particulate matter in the air, like most of us in this room do with our air conditioned cars and our homes on quiet streets, far from industry or freeways, surrounded by trees and plants that help to filter the particulates out for us. Society's cost of respiratory care for these patients is immense – other speakers have detailed the costs thoroughly for you I'm sure already so I won't go into those statistics here.

What can be done to help lower levels of particulate matter so that people can be healthier, and therefore save society money?

I agree with the recommendations put forth by the American Lung Association for an annual PM limit of 11 micrograms per cubic meter, and a daily limit of 25 micrograms per cubic meter, though I think these recommendations could be even stronger. In reality, no level of particulate matter is safe, so really, we should set our standard at Zero. So asking for 11/25 is actually a compromise.

Here is why I think that the 11/25 standards, or better, should be adopted: Setting strong standards will force the states to become creative about making our air cleaner. With the pressure of stronger particulate matter standards, perhaps the states will triple the amount of mass transit in cities and between cities. Imagine light rail running every 5 blocks, every 5 minutes. This would not only take cars off the road (witness New York City, Vienna, Paris etc. where many middle class people live happily

without cars)- and people taking mass transit won't have to wait hours for connecting trains, having them sitting on busy streets for so long. With the pressure of stronger standards, the states also might creatively encourage conversion to solar and wind electricity generation. And note that all of these solutions; more mass transit, solar and wind electricity generation, all would create thousands of jobs. The argument by the oil and auto industries that the economy will be hurt if we adopt stronger PM standards is absurd. We are proposing replacing one way of doing things with another. And any time society converts its infrastructure from one aspect to another, it takes people power to enact that conversion. Clearly jobs are needed to make the changes that we need to make to reduce PM. In fact, solar energy production employs more people per kilowatt produced than do oil-burning power plants. And building more light rail all over the US would employ hundreds of thousands of people. So we would actually help the economy if we converted to solar electricity and much better mass transit.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you on behalf of my clients, families in poverty with young children. It all boils down to a moral issue: does the government protect all of its citizens from harm? Or does the government protect the petroleum and auto industries, who make money for solely for themselves, without regard to the health of all of our citizens? The choice, in the case of Particulate Matter in our air in 2012, is the EPA's. Thank you for making the decision that truly benefits all of us.