Carbon pollution from power plants is contributing to climate change and poses serious threats to our health, infrastructure and economy.

Virginia currently lags behind most other states on both energy efficiency and renewable energy. In 2016, Virginia ranked 33rd in the nation on its efficiency policy and program efforts, according to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. As of 2015, Virginia ranked 30th in solar-energy capacity, and has no large scale renewable energy generation from wind or other sources.

The Clean Power Plan offers an unprecedented opportunity for Virginia to begin taking advantage of the benefits of clean energy. Increasing our energy efficiency and using renewable energy resources like wind and solar can lower electric bills and provide new, local jobs, while at the same time ensuring our families have clean air to breathe and our environment is protected.

**WHAT IS THE CLEAN POWER PLAN?**

In August 2015, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released the national Clean Power Plan to limit carbon pollution from power plants, the nation’s largest source of greenhouse gas emissions. The standard was designed to give states the flexibility to develop compliance plans that will fit their unique needs. The goal of the new standard is to reduce harmful carbon pollution from the U.S. power sector at least 32% by 2030 (from 2005 levels).

All states must comply with the new carbon pollution standard by developing a State Implementation Plan. States may choose to comply with a regional approach, or individually. The submission of initial plans to the EPA has been delayed due to ongoing litigation. Oral arguments in front of the D.C. Circuit Court were held last year and a ruling is expected between now and May 2017. The Clean Power Plan is built on a strong legal foundation and experts are confident it will be upheld.

President Trump has no decree from the American people to roll back the Clean Power Plan. 75% of adults nationwide support limiting carbon emissions as a pollutant. The Clean Power Plan has a strong foundation in the Clean Air Act and it simply cannot be revoked with the stroke of a pen. We will defend the Clean Power Plan against attacks from Trump and Congress—and we will use every grassroots, legal and legislative tactic available to do so.

**LOWER, MORE STABLE ELECTRIC BILLS**

If Virginia uses this opportunity to improve energy efficiency, Virginians will see large savings on their power bills. Decreasing wasted energy will also reduce demand on the power grid, which will improve the reliability of electricity. With renewable energy costs rapidly dropping, increasing our use of these resources will also reduce energy bills over time.

With solar and wind energy, the fuel is free. Unlike coal and natural gas power plants, there are no fuel costs to create price volatility, and solar and wind power become more cost-effective every day as their use increases across the country. A recent Georgia Tech report found that if Virginia moves towards clean energy, households could see savings of $415 on a yearly average by 2030.

**JOB CREATION**

Virginia is well positioned to take advantage of the clean energy economy with a skilled workforce and high-quality universities and technical schools to train for these new jobs. Renewable energy and energy efficiency industries necessitate a wide variety of skills. Many of these jobs are local installation jobs that cannot be outsourced. Additionally, solar energy creates more jobs per unit of energy than any other form of generation.
Governor McAuliffe has estimated that nearly 40,000 energy efficiency jobs can be created here in Virginia. In 2014 alone, clean energy created roughly $3.9 billion dollars in revenue in Virginia.4

HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES
Relying on dirty energy poisons our air, water and land. Pollution from burning coal contributes to four of the five leading causes of death in the U.S. and sends thousands of people to the emergency room every year with severe asthma attacks, heart attacks and respiratory illnesses. Cutting carbon pollution will help protect vulnerable communities and residents. The carbon pollution driving climate change is released alongside other dangerous soot- and smog-forming pollutants that can lead to lung and heart disease. Low-income and minority communities are more likely to be exposed to higher levels of pollution and more likely to live by polluting facilities like power plants. A study by the Harvard School of Public Health ranks Virginia among the top thirteen states nationwide in public health gains from implementing the Clean Power Plan.5

Rising temperatures are also lengthening pollen seasons which could worsen allergy symptoms and have serious health consequences for Virginians. The state is expected to average 75 more 90 degree days per year by 2065.6

PROTECTING VIRGINIA’S COASTLINE
Residents of coastal neighborhoods, especially Norfolk and Virginia Beach, are seeing their streets and homes flood more and more often. Hampton Roads already has the highest sea level rise on the East Coast. The Virginia Institute of Marine Science estimates another 1.5 foot rise in the next 20 to 50 years.7 Reducing carbon pollution can help mitigate these impacts.

LOCAL CLEAN ENERGY V. CORPORATE POLLUTERS
A state plan to reduce carbon pollution that benefits most Virginians differs greatly from what big polluters want. Renewable energy and energy efficiency will provide the most economic value for consumers in addition to creating local jobs and investment. But Virginia’s energy companies like Dominion, Appalachian Power and the Old Dominion Electric Cooperative want to keep building expensive power plants to increase their profits and maintain their role as centralized energy providers. They suggest we expand our use of natural gas to meet our needs. However, fracking to access natural gas releases high levels of methane, nitrogen oxides and carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, price fluctuates widely, and transporting gas is also risky. Like coal, natural gas is a non-renewable fossil fuel with long-lasting consequences.8

TAKE ACTION NOW!
Add your voice to the hundreds of thousands of Virginians who support climate action! With your help, Virginia can become a clean energy leader. We know that our state can reduce carbon pollution from power plants by as much as 40% by 2030. We will be doing our part to address climate change and will be reducing our energy bills while we’re at it.

Tell Governor Terry McAuliffe, Department of Environmental Quality Director David Paylor, and your public officials to address climate change!

For more information, go to: sierraclub.org/virginia

Renewable energy resources can provide all the power Virginia needs. But, with the state’s most powerful corporate polluters opposing these common-sense solutions, the voices of Virginia’s citizens, locally-owned businesses, and public officials are more important than ever. Get involved today!

Questions?
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ENDNOTES


