

Statement about RPS changes and biomass

by Rev. Dr. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas

(These are the remarks I gave at the hearing held in Springfield on June 5, 2019)

My name is Rev. Dr. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas. I'm an Episcopal priest with an ecumenical job. I serve as Missioner for Creation Care for the 375 churches of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ, and also for the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts, which stretches from Worcester to the border of New York State and whose diocesan headquarters are located right here in Springfield.

I am here to speak against Governor Baker's proposed new standards that consider biomass a form of renewable energy. I am here to stand with trees.

Forests are sacred spaces, not spaces to make a fortune. Trees matter. They sequester carbon, and the latest IPCC report makes it abundantly clear that in order to avert climate chaos we must protect and enlarge our forests, not cut them down. It's absurd to claim that burning intact trees is carbon neutral because new trees will grow back some day. The truth is that logging releases an immediate pulse of carbon into the atmosphere that will take years for young trees to absorb – and there's no way to re-freeze the polar caps and the glaciers that will have vanished in the meantime.

It's also absurd to claim that incinerating trees is a form of clean energy, for inefficient biomass power plants actually release more CO₂ per unit of energy than coal-fired power plants do. If humanity manages to survive on this planet, it will be thanks in part to the forests that we leave intact and to the new forests that we plant.

Trees are essential to human health and survival. Trees are also essential to the human spirit. Biblical scholars point out that there is a tree on the first page of Genesis and on the last page of Revelation – the first and last pages of the Bible. There is a tree in the first psalm, and the Bible refers to its wisdom as a Tree of Life (Proverbs 3:18). Jesus calls himself the true vine (John 15:1).¹

Love calls me – the God of life calls me – to stand with trees, to stand with all our brother-sister beings that are so swiftly being destroyed by an economic system that heedlessly devours the web of life that God entrusted to our care.

I call upon Governor Baker and his administration to drop plans to count incineration as renewable energy. I call upon Governor Baker and his administration to stop renewable energy subsidies for all biomass and trash incineration in our state.

¹ Matthew Sleeth, *Reforesting Faith: What Trees Teach Us About the Nature of God and His Love for Us* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2019).