



SUPPORT S.2288 /H.3549

An Act to remove woody biomass from the greenhouse gas emissions standard for municipal lighting plants

(Sen. Adam Gomez, Hampden; Rep. Orlando Ramos, Chicopee/Springfield)

BILL PURPOSE

This legislation amends the Greenhouse Gas Emission Standard (GGES) for municipal lighting plants that was created under the 2021 Climate Roadmap law. Without this change, wood-burning biomass power plants will automatically qualify as a “non-carbon emitting source” for this program **beginning January 1, 2026**.

PFPI urges the Legislature to take swift action to close this “biomass loophole” before it takes effect January 1, 2026. The language of S.2888/H.3549 was included in the Senate climate bill last year, but was not retained in the final negotiated climate package.¹

THE ISSUE

Biomass power plants emit a lot of carbon: 50% - 60% more CO₂ than modern coal plants and 200-300% more CO₂ than natural gas plants per unit of energy generated. Net CO₂ emissions from burning forest wood exceed emissions from fossil fuels for decades to over a century. In addition, biomass plants emit large quantities of fine particulates (PM_{2.5}) and other harmful air pollutants, and are disproportionately sited in low-income communities and communities of color, adding to the health burdens in those communities.

In 2022, the Legislature removed woody biomass from the list of eligible sources for Massachusetts’ Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) on the principle that it is a harmful, polluting energy source and should not be eligible for “clean” energy subsidies. Massachusetts should have a consistent policy regarding the treatment of woody biomass energy. Allowing MLPs to treat biomass as a “non-carbon emitting source” is not only contrary to science, it also seriously undermines the Legislature’s intent and the Commonwealth’s ability to meet its climate goals.

BACKGROUND

Municipal lighting plants supply approximately 14% of electricity used by Massachusetts residents. However, they are not required to comply with the Renewable Portfolio Standard, which requires investor-owned utilities to purchase a certain percentage of renewable energy credits each year.

In 2021, the Legislature passed *An Act Creating a Next-Generation Roadmap for Massachusetts* (Chapter 8 of the Acts of 2021), which created a Greenhouse Gas Emission Standard for MLPs. The law sets a minimum percentage of “non-carbon emitting energy” sold by each MLP to their retail electricity customers, as follows: (i) 50% non-carbon emitting energy by 2030; (ii) 75% non-carbon emitting energy by 2040; and (iii) energy sales achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Unfortunately, the Legislature included biomass, without limitations, in the list of “non-carbon emitting

¹ Amendment 34, S2829, 6/17/2024, <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S2829/BillHistory?pageNumber=1>.

sources” and for MLPs only. This is a significant deviation from Massachusetts’ other clean energy statutes and programs, such as the RPS, the Alternative Energy Portfolio Standard (APS), and the Clean Energy Standard (310 CMR 7.75), which all recognize biomass power as a carbon-emitting source.

In response to public concern, the legislature delayed the inclusion of biomass in the new standard for five years, allowing time for the Executive branch to prepare a study on the health and environmental impacts of biomass energy as required under Section 102 of the law. That study was never completed. Pursuant to Sections 34 and 112, biomass fuels will automatically be added to the list of “non-carbon emitting sources” as of January 1, 2026.

WHY THIS LEGISLATION IS NEEDED

The MLP Greenhouse Gas Emission Standard creates a major loophole for biomass power plants across the Northeast to market their dirty power to MLPs, with no restrictions whatsoever. As MA and other states in the Northeast, including NY, NH, and CT, end or scale down subsidies for biomass power plants, the new markets created by this law could be a lifeline for the industry. **The Legislature must close this loophole now, before MLPs lock in their energy contracts for 2026 and beyond.**

Biomass was included in the MLP GGES largely for the benefit of Palmer Renewable Energy (PRE), which is still seeking to build a controversial 42-MW wood-burning power plant in East Springfield. The company had built its financing strategy around securing long-term power purchase agreements with MLPs. PRE previously secured commitments from MLPs to purchase approximately 75% of its power. All of those original contracts with PRE have now been canceled, but MLPs could still avail themselves of this loophole. Moreover, PRE is presently in court challenging the revocation of local and state permits, and, in a setback for the community, the company recently prevailed on its air quality permit appeal, which has been remanded by the court to the agency for review.

STRONG SUPPORT IN MASSACHUSETTS FOR ENDING BIOMASS SUBSIDIES

Massachusetts groups strongly support ending subsidies for burning woody biomass. More than 100 organizations signed a [letter](#) last session urging the Legislature to pass this bill.² In addition, Governor Maura Healey pledged to end subsidies for forest bioenergy for electricity as part of her [climate platform](#), stating that “*Burning wood for bioenergy depletes our forests, increases greenhouse gas emissions, and is a threat to human health.*”³

PFPI urges you to support and co-sponsor [S.2288/H.3549](#), *An Act to remove woody biomass from the greenhouse gas emissions standard for municipal lighting plants.*

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² https://www.notoxicbiomass.org/_files/ugd/252fbc_8d1d6c82c40548ea9161a1ad69a50c79.pdf.

³ <https://maurahealey.com/issues/climate/>.