Dear Ohio Senators and Representatives:

As university and college scientists and educators living and working in the Buckeye state, we applaud the rules adopted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency imposing limits on mercury emissions and other hazardous air toxics. These federal rules help protect the air we breathe, the local fish we eat, and the wildlife and natural spaces we love from harmful pollution originating in Ohio and elsewhere. Scientific studies clearly and definitively demonstrate that these emissions are hazardous to human health. We are concerned that these rules will be overturned, weakened or delayed by the Congress in the coming weeks. We urge you to vote against any action diminishing the U.S. EPA’s Mercury and Air Toxics Standard (MATS).

Mercury and the other air toxics covered by MATS are potent neurotoxins that impact the health of humans, wildlife, and ecosystems (e.g. services, provisioning, etc.). Our children are most vulnerable to these impacts, with fetal exposures to mercury resulting in deleterious impacts to language, memory, visual-motor skills, and attention. In adults, exposure to mercury can damage the nervous system, with newer research showing possible impacts on the immune and cardiovascular systems. Most of mercury’s harms to human health come from consuming contaminated fish. Once deposited on the surface waters of our state, mercury is converted to methylmercury where it is consumed and biomagnified ~1-million fold up the food chain. Ecologically-relevant and sub-lethal concentrations of methylmercury can affect the growth, survival, and reproduction of fish, birds, and other animals. Large sports fish, like the largemouth bass in the Little Miami River or the largemouth bass, crappie, and saugeye found in Charles Mill Lake, are most vulnerable to these effects. Recreational anglers and their families, including tribal groups and others consuming these fish can accumulate harmful amounts of methylmercury. There is also increasing and compelling evidence that mercury deposition can impact the terrestrial ecosystem, namely songbirds, bats, and other insectivores.

Ohio ranks third nationally in mercury air emissions from all sources, and second for mercury emissions from energy generating units. While the Ohio EPA has taken some steps to reduce mercury exposures through its mercury product law, this effort falls short of addressing sources of mercury and other air toxics harming Ohio’s people and animals. The U.S. EPA’s MATS rules provide an important path to protecting the air and water in our state by limiting the emissions from
facilities in Ohio and other states. The U.S. EPA estimates that the MATS rules will prevent up to 560 deaths in our state, and result in $1.9 to $4.6 billion of health benefits to Ohioans in 2016.

We, Ohio university and college scientists, urge you to maintain U.S. EPA’s MATS rules in the interests of ensuring public health, wildlife, natural beauty, and the economy of the state we call home.

Sincerely,

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